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Nick Carter Stories

THE DEATH PLOT
OR
NICK CARTER'S HUNCH

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NICK CARTER STORIES

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THE DEATH PLOT;

Or, NICK CARTER'S HUNCH.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

DEAD?

There was a grim, tight-lipped expression on the face of Nick Carter, master detective, as he sprang from one of his big touring cars and strode up the steps of his house on Madison Avenue, New York.

He opened the door with a latchkey and mounted to his study, that clearing house of criminal mysteries, which had seen the beginning and ending of almost countless cases.

No one was in the room when he entered. He pressed a button, and Joseph, his impressive-looking butler, promptly answered it.

"Where is Chick?" the detective asked crisply.

"In his room, sir. Shall I call him?"

"Please."

The butler backed out, and a few moments later Chickering Carter, Nick's chief assistant and adopted son, stepped in with his usual springy stride.

"Didn't expect you back just yet, chief," he explained. "What's doing?"

"That's what I would like to know. What would you you say if I told you that French Jimmy is dead?"

An expression of incredulous amazement overspread the young assistant's clean-cut face.

"French Jimmy Lebeau—dead!" he exclaimed. "You're romancing, chief! I would say it was—well, too good to be true, or something like that."

"I don't blame you. That's what they tell me at Bellevue, though."

"At Bellevue? When was he transferred to the hospital, pray? The last I heard of him, he was safely planted in the Tombs—and we certainly had to extend ourselves a little to land him there!"

"That's where I supposed he was, too, but he seems to have exchanged the Tombs for a tomb."

"Are you sure it's a tomb, or any other resting place as final?"

"That's the trouble. I'm not, and there are several things I don't quite like about the affair. I learned late this afternoon, for the first time, that our loft-robbing friend was taken ill mysteriously two days ago. The prison physician didn't seem to know what was the matter with him, and Jimmy was taken to the prison wing at Bellevue. The doctors there seem to have been up in the air from the beginning. One of them insists it was sleeping sickness, although he never saw a case and doesn't pretend to say how Lebeau could have contracted it. The others on the staff have their respective pet theories, but they all agree that Jimmy died this morning, and that his body was removed by relatives this afternoon."

Chick whistled.

"Removed, eh?" he queried, with lifted eyebrows. "Prompt work! I didn't know that Lebeau had such things as relatives lying around loose, let alone as handy as all that."

"Nor did I, but it seems that a pretty young countrywoman—or so she was described to me—put in an appearance early this afternoon. Jimmy had asked to have a certain Lem Wiggins, a farmer, living out at White Plains somewhere, notified in case anything happened to him. He said that Wiggins was his uncle."

"I thought his mother was a Minnesota girl, who married a French Canadian," objected Chick.

"So I have always understood, but there isn't necessarily any conflict there. The other's name may have been Wiggins, and her brother may be living in Westchester County, so far as that is concerned. It's the rest that has set me wondering a bit."

"Go on."

"The hospital officials sent a telegram to this Wiggins as soon as Lebeau was pronounced dead, as they always do

when they have means of getting in touch with friends or relatives. They didn't hear anything in reply until this girl came along. She said she was Lem Wiggins' daughter Hattie, and showed a letter purporting to come from her father, empowering the hospital to turn the body over to the bearer—or, rather, to the undertaker named, with whom Wiggins said he had communicated.

"I saw the letter at Bellevue. It was written in pencil, on cheap, lined note paper, in a clumsy hand, with many abbreviations and misspellings—just such a letter as many an old-time farmer might be expected to write. It expressed shame at the disgrace which Jimmy had brought to the family, but declared that 'blood was thicker'n water any day,' and announced the writer's determination to see that his dead sister's boy had a decent Christian burial. There was also an apology for sending his daughter on such an errand, coupled with the excuse that Wiggins couldn't get away from his farm duties long enough to come to the city. That seemed a little queer, but I reflected that farmers of the old school sometimes have a strange way of treating their womenfolk, and take death more or less as a matter of course. The thing which struck me as oddest, however, was the stress which the writer laid on one significant point."

"What was that?"

"He said he didn't know what the custom was about such things, whether the hospital attended to it or left it to the undertaker named by the relatives, but he was quite insistent that the body should not be embalmed."

"The deuce you say! I don't wonder you sat up and took notice!" exclaimed Chick.

"I did. I would have been more or less inclined to be curious about the reported death of as slippery an individual as French Jimmy, in any case, but that looked decidedly off color, when taken in connection with all the rest—the mysterious nature of the malady, the brevity of the illness, and so on."

"I should say so! If there was anything phony about the death, embalming would set all doubts at rest, and in a way that wouldn't be agreeable to Lebeau and his friends. We've run across that sort of stipulation more than once before, haven't we? Of course, nothing of that sort had been done?"

"Certainly not. The hospital people were waiting to hear from Wiggins before they took any steps. And it doesn't seem to have entered their heads that there was anything questionable about the affair. The letter was ingeniously worded, I'll admit—if it wasn't genuine. Wiggins put the request that no embalming should be done, on the basis of a family sentiment that almost amounted to a religious scruple, apparently. He said that his people had always been greatly opposed to embalming, holding that bodies should be returned in their natural state to the dust from which they had sprung, while the souls went marching on, or something to that effect; and that out of deference to his dead sister's memory it was very important to him that her son should be buried in accordance with the family principles."

The detective paused for a moment, while his assistant eyed him expectantly.

"Well, he got his wish," Nick added significantly. "The undertaker already had his instructions, and Jimmy's body was turned over to him, after the usual formalities, presumably for shipping to White Plains."

"When was that?"

"About four o'clock this afternoon."

"Who is the undertaker?"

"James Hicks, who has a place on Second Avenue, near the Stuyvesant Social Club's rooms."

"Jimmy's old stamping ground, eh? That's interesting, too. Have you seen Hicks?"

"I didn't let the grass grow under my tires, you may be sure, after I heard about it. It was six o'clock, however, before I reached Hicks' place, and he informed me that the body had already been put on the train for White Plains. He was plausible enough about it—said that as there was no embalming to do and all the rest had been taken care of at the hospital, there was nothing for him to do except to put it into the coffin and take it to the train."

"I see. You didn't tell Hicks who you were, of course?"

"Hardly. I went in disguise and left my car a few blocks away. Hicks knows me only as a friend of Jimmy's, who was willing to bury him at my expense if no one else claimed the body, and who had got his name at the hospital, but no other information. Oh, no; I don't believe I gave the undertaker any reason to suspect any real errand. That wouldn't have done at all, although he may not be in the secret—if there is a secret. If the doctors at Bellevue were fooled, a fourth-rate undertaker could easily have been gulled, too. I wasn't taking a chance, though."

"But Jimmy may be in the undertaking rooms still. You weren't in a position to search them."

"True, but if he's there, neither he nor his body will come out without our knowledge. Patsy is handling that end of the business. He was with me at the hospital, and I have left him to keep an eye on Hicks' place until further notice."

"Good! They won't fool Patsy," declared Chick, always ready to give his best-known fellow assistant the credit he deserved. "And I suppose you're going up to White Plains?"

"We are," Nick returned quietly. "I've taken a notion to cultivate the acquaintance of Lem Wiggins, R. F. D. number seven, and, if possible, to have a look at French Jimmy's mortal remains. If the immortal part of him isn't in that casket, too, I'll begin to think I'm seeing things in the dark!"

"Same here, chief. Going right away?"

"A little sooner, if possible. I don't want to give those people any more time to put anything over on us than I can help."

They were not destined to leave immediately, however, but when they did go they were in possession of an additional bit of information and accompanied by an unexpected ally.

CHAPTER II.

A PECULIAR LETTER.

They were just about to start for White Plains when a caller on urgent business was announced.

It was Johnnie Dugan.

The young Irishman was well known to Nick and his assistants, for it was through him that they had first got on the track of French Jimmy Lebeau, the leader of a notorious gang of loft thieves, several months before.

There had been a note of romance of an unusual sort in the case from the beginning.

Dugan, who drove a milk wagon, had been engaged for two years or more to Mamie Byrne, a pretty waitress. A month before his first visit to the detective, Mamie had thrown him over, however, in favor of a certain Joe Little, who was the president of the Stuyvesant Social Club, a good deal of a dandy, and a free spender—although his source of income was more or less of a mystery.

The immediate cause of Johnnie's appeal to the great detective was the fact that Little had betrayed the girl into a mock marriage, conducted by a "Father Cunningham," who turned out to be one of the members of the club. Dugan wanted to shield Mamie and to marry her himself if she would consent. He had his suspicions about the marriage, but wanted proofs, and also told the detective enough to convince the latter that Joe Little was really Lebeau, whom the police had long been trying to convict, and that his club was nothing more or less than a gang of loft robbers, operating under that innocent disguise.

The evidence was easily obtained, but it had been a different matter to capture French Jimmy, largely owing to the fact that the girl persisted in helping him in unexpected ways for some time, partly because of her infatuation, and partly from a mistaken sense of duty to the man whom she looked upon as linked with her in the strongest of all bonds, even if those bonds were not recognized by the law or society at large.

Finally, however, Lebeau, his two lieutenants, Duluth Dan Flynn and Packy Weis, and more than twenty of his forty thieves—as some readers of the "Arabian Nights" had dubbed the membership of the Stuyvesant Social Club—had been lodged behind the bars.

At the same time, Mamie Byrne had professed to see the error of her ways, and had consented, in return for Nick Carter's promise to save her from the consequences of her entanglement with the gang, to make her home at the detective's house for a time, under the sympathetic care of Ida Jones, Nick's charming woman assistant.

Mamie had remained under Nick's fatherly and hospitable roof for some weeks, during which time Johnnie Dugan had lost no opportunity to press his suit. He loved the girl sincerely, and, knowing that she had been grossly deceived by Lebeau, was more than ready to give her his name on almost any terms.

At last he had won her consent to marry him, and Nick Carter and his whole staff had been honored guests at the wedding. Mamie was truly a wife now, and seemed to realize the nobility of her humble young husband, which was in such startling contrast to the trickery and ruthless selfishness which the outwardly fascinating criminal had displayed toward her throughout their ill-starred life together.

That had been two months before, and Nick had seen little of the Dugans since then. He was correspondingly surprised, therefore, to have Johnnie enter his study, wild-eyed and disheveled, just when French Jimmy was once more occupying his thoughts.

"What under the sun is the matter, Johnnie?" he asked solicitously. "Anything wrong at home"

"Everything, Mr. Carter—everything!" was the frantic reply. "Mamie is gone!"

"Gone? You don't mean dead?"

"I don't know. I—I would almost hope so, dearly as I love her, if I didn't know that that fiend is safe in the Tombs!"

He did not seem to be able to put his meaning very clearly, but it was evident that he would have feared that Mamie had gone back to French Jimmy, if that had been possible.

Nick and his assistants exchanged glances, which, unfortunately, Dugan intercepted.

"Do you know anything about it?" the latter asked quickly.

"Nothing at all, Johnnie," Nick hastened to assure him. "If you mean that Mamie has disappeared, we are more sorry than we can say, and you may be sure we'll do everything in our power to find her. Tell us all you can."

Dugan did not seem quite satisfied with the reply, although he had learned to rely upon Nick's word.

"Well, we were very happy, Mr. Carter," he began, after a little hesitation; "at least, I was, and Mamie seemed to be, too, until a few days ago. Then she began to act queer, and I suspected that she'd been crying while I was away. She denied it, though, and wouldn't tell me anything. When I tried to corner her, and asked her if she was sick of her bargain, she burst into tears and said that I was much too good for her, and a whole lot of nonsense like that. She said she'd been happier with me than she had ever hoped to be again, or deserved to be. I wouldn't repeat that, Mr. Carter, if it wasn't that I want you to understand just how things were."

"I understand, Johnnie. It's hard to talk about such things, but it's necessary sometimes, just as it is necessary to tell a doctor everything you can. Did she say anything else that seems important to you now, after what has happened?"

"No, sir; nothing that I noticed particularly. But she left a note for me when she went away to-day. I found it when I got home to-night. It was on the table, along with my dinner—cold, but all laid out ready, just as she always had it."

The poor fellow's voice broke, and he blew his nose violently as he handed over the message which had brought him in such haste to pour out his troubles in Nick's sympathetic ear.

There was no envelope. The paper had merely been folded, with one corner turned down, and the outside bore the one word: "Johnnie."

This is what the detective read when he opened it:

"DEAREST JOHNNIE: I know this is going to be terrible hard for you, but I can't help it—honest I can't, Johnnie, dear! I must go away. You've been so good to me. I didn't suppose a man could be so good to a poor, weak fool of a girl, who wasn't good enough to black his shoes. And this is the way I pay you back! It breaks my heart to do it, Johnnie, but it can't be helped—truly it can't. It was too good to last—and I wasn't good enough, or hadn't been, anyway. You won't believe it, but I'm going away for your own good, Johnnie. I swear I didn't mean to treat you like this when I was weak enough to give in and marry you. I knew you were taking an awful chance, but I never dreamed I would do anything like this. Once wrong, always wrong, though, I guess. I thought I could 'come back,' as they say, but

I couldn't. The brand was too deep. Try not to mind any more than you can help, Johnnie, and don't curse me in your heart—please don't! I deserve it, I know, but, oh, if you could only think of me as wanting to do right and be a good wife to you, but not having the chance! Good-by, dear Johnnie—forever! Don't try to find me, I beg you! I can't tell you why, but you'll be sorry if you do. Your wicked wife, MAMIE."

"This is a very strange letter, Dugan," the detective said gravely. "Haven't you any idea what she means?"

"I wish to Heaven I had, Mr. Carter! She's a good girl. Nobody'll ever make me believe that she ain't, or that she's run away because things were too slow for her. She ain't that kind."

"I know she isn't, Johnnie," Carter assured him. "That's just what makes this hard to understand. She is keeping something back—something, I'm inclined to think, which would be more or less to her credit if we knew what it was."

"God bless you for that, Mr. Carter!" Dugan said fervently. "I'm so glad you think she hasn't—hasn't—you know what I mean. She would never do that."

"I am sure of it, too. She promised me to turn her back on all the influences which had been dragging her down, and, if it was in her power, I am sure she would have kept that promise. Now, would she have married you if she hadn't thought the past was dead and she was free to make a new start? Whatever she has done has not been from choice, you may be sure. Again and again she expresses her reluctance and implies that her action has been forced upon her, either by individuals or by circumstances over which she has no control—or honestly believes she has none, which amounts to the same thing. Yet she evidently doesn't dare say so in so many words. Instead, she seeks, more or less half-heartedly, to make you believe that she is not worth hunting for. She seems to think it is her duty to turn you against her if she can, and yet she cannot bear the thought that you should. The letter wasn't dictated, that is clear. If it had been, it wouldn't be such a curious mixture. It's all hers, but was obviously composed under great stress and uncertainty of mind. All sorts of things were struggling for utterance, and yet she did not know what to say. She blurts out one thing and then, in almost the next sentence, seems to take another tone altogether. Finally she warns you not to try to find her, although after telling you that she is acting for your good, despite appearances. That is highly significant to me, as is her statement that she can't tell you why you are not to seek her."

Dugan's face flushed an angry red, and his big, freckled hands were clenched.

"Lebeau's gang must be behind this," he said, with conviction. "I might have known he wouldn't let her alone, even if he was locked up, so long as any of his mob were still outside. And I'll bet that's what you have been thinking all along! I saw the way you looked at each other, and I know it meant something. Please tell me what you know, Mr. Carter. Anything is better than this uncertainty. You said you didn't know anything about Mamie being gone, and I believe you, of course, but you know something else, but you know something else that fits in. What is it?"

CHAPTER III.

WHY MAMIE LEFT.

Nick Carter did not like to have his hand forced.

He had not meant to tell Johnnie Dugan what he suspected, but the young Irishman had been too keen for him. He knew that Dugan had plenty of grit, and realized that it would be best, as things were, to take him fully into his confidence in order to prevent him from conjuring up all sorts of harrowing possibilities in his mind.

"You are right, Johnnie," he said soberly, after a pause. "There has been a new development in the Lebeau case, which we had just been discussing when you came. We really know nothing that gives us any light on your problem, but we have certain suspicions, which, now that we know of Mamie's disappearance, may dovetail in with that. I would have preferred to put them to the test before saying anything about them to you, but now——"

"Oh, please tell me, Mr. Carter!" the young fellow pleaded eagerly. "I can bear almost anything, so long as it doesn't mean that Mamie has left me to go to anybody else."

"I am sure there is nothing of that sort involved—in the way you mean, at least. But supposing French Jimmy had worked out an ingenious plan of escape, for instance? He would, naturally, try to carry it out while he was still down here, awaiting his long-delayed trial, rather than after he was sent to Sing Sing, wouldn't he? The opportunities are greater in the Tombs, and when once a prisoner is outside the walls he has a swarming ant hill of a city all about him in which to hide, whereas, up the river, there is nothing but a little town, surrounded by miles and miles of open country, peopled by those who are always on the lookout for escaped convicts, and, naturally, notice every stranger, just as all country people do. Besides, if a man is in the Tombs, and he becomes very ill—or seems to—there is always a chance of being transferred to Bellevue for treatment, where the opportunities for escape are still more tempting. Finally, supposing French Jimmy to have conceived such a plan, to whom would he naturally turn for help first of all? Wouldn't he turn to the one who had helped him more than once before?"

Johnnie Dugan's face was drawn and haggard, and his eyes burned questioningly.

"You mean that he's got away—that Mamie has helped him again?" he demanded brokenly.

"I can't give you a definite answer to either question, because I don't know, Johnnie," was the gentle reply. "I fear that Lebeau has escaped, or is in process of escape, so to speak; but I may be far from the mark. If he is, a young woman is helping him. I haven't seen her, but she has been described to me. If it is any satisfaction to you to know it, the description does not fit Mamie in several important respects, especially in the color of the hair. A wig might easily explain that, though."

"Tell me about it—all about it!" Dugan pleaded.

Nick told the young Irishman of French Jimmy's supposed illness and death, Wiggins' letter, and the visit of the girl, Hattie, to Bellevue.

"Now you are at liberty to judge for yourself," he went on. There is nothing impossible about a fake death. Such tricks have been played successfully from time to time by extraordinary clever and venturesome criminals. I have had several cases of that sort myself, and I know

that it is a comparatively simple matter to deceive the ordinary run of doctors, especially when they are as busy as those at Bellevue, or are aware of no particular reason for suspicion. It remains to be seen, of course, whether we have any ground for our fears in this instance or not. Lebeau may be dead, and everything straight, for all I know. But a thorough investigation is necessary, and I am going to make it at once. As for the girl, although it seemed strange that she should be sent on such an errand, it had, naturally, never occurred to me to connect her with Mamie until you brought word of your wife's disappearance. Then I began to wonder. It looked as if Mamie's departure from home today, of all days, might be more than a coincidence."

"But she doesn't care any more for that fellow! She can't!" Dugan burst out. "I won't believe it! Besides, she promised you faithfully to have nothing more to do with him, long before she ever agreed to marry me, and Mamie isn't one to break her word."

"That's perfectly true—under ordinary circumstances" agreed the detective.

"Under all circumstances," insisted Johnnie.

Nick shook his head, but his look was very kindly.

"There are several things about women that you don't know yet, Johnnie," he replied. "The best ones will break their word any day, if, by so doing, they think they can protect those they love. And I don't blame them—quite the contrary, in fact. I admire them greatly for it, but it sometimes makes it hard to know on which side of the fence they're to be found."

Anguish was written on the young Irishman's face.

"I can't believe she loves that beast any more!" he murmured hoarsely. "It's—it's impossible!"

Carter smiled.

"Who said anything about her loving him?" he asked.

Dugan raised his head swiftly.

"You don't—you can't—mean that she's done it for me!" he cried incredulously, but the light of hope was in his eyes.

"If she's done anything of the sort at all, I'm sure that is why she has done it," Nick answered.

"But how—why——"

"That is another matter. It doubtless seems almost unbelievable to you, but you must continue to remember that you are dealing with a woman. Mamie's emotions have swayed her reason in the past and led her to take strange routes in trying to follow what she believed was the right path. She probably hasn't changed in that respect, and Lebeau has shown himself clever enough to play skillfully on her emotions. This is all theory as yet—all in the air, of course—but I can easily understand how he might think he had found a way to kill two birds with one stone. He's too shrewd to approach your wife with any plan that would imply, on the face of it, the least disloyalty to you. But he unquestionably remembers how much service she was to him in eluding the police and us, thanks to the deceptions he practiced upon her and the mistaken sense of loyalty to him which he was able to foster in her mind. That being so, he would think of her again in connection with any new scheme to hoodwink his enemies. And he would cast about for a fresh means of tricking her into serving his ends. He wouldn't dare appeal to her on the score of love for him, because he would feel pretty certain that he had already killed that.

"But why not approach her on the side of her love for you?" continued Nick. "Why not threaten you with destruction at the hands of his gang—of those who still remain at liberty—if she refused to aid in his contemplated escape? No matter how much she loathed the hard necessity thrust upon her, do you think she would hesitate long about doing his bidding, even though she realized that, by saving you in such a way against your will, she would probably turn you against her forever?"

"Gee, I guess you've hit it, Mr. Carter!" ejaculated Dugan. "It would be just like Mame to fall for a thing like that—and just like that cur to cook up such a scheme. But you spoke of killing too birds with one stone. What did you mean by that?"

Nick paused for a moment before he replied.

"Oh, simply that Lebeau might take a fiendish delight, incidentally, on messing things up between you and Mamie," he answered.

That was true enough, but the thought that was really in his mind was that, if his theory should prove to be correct, French Jimmy could be counted on to do everything in his power to involve the girl, and make it impossible for her, if he could, ever to return to her husband. He thought best not to say so, however.

"He can't do that," Johnnie declared stoutly; "not if Mamie has simply been fooled by him again, on my account, anyway. I'd forgive her anything if her heart wasn't in it, or if she thought she was doing it for me, as the letter says. But how could she be such a fool again, knowing him as well as she does—or ought to by this time? And if he had her worried by his threats, which it would have been easy enough for him to send through one of those choice specimens of his, why in the name of common sense didn't she come to you about it if she was afraid I wouldn't pay any attention to it?"

"Because she evidently had some notion that it was a just retribution for her previous folly, that it was a debt she had to pay in person."

"I suppose you're right. What are you going to do?"

Nick told him, and Johnnie, when he heard of the plan to go to White Plains at once, begged so hard to accompany Nick and Chick that he was permitted to join them.

The three were soon on their way in one of the detective's cars, with Danny, Nick's chauffeur, at the wheel.

Before they left town they picked up Jack Wise, Nick's "society" assistant, who increased their numbers to five, all of whom were ready and even anxious to take a hand if the opportunity presented itself.

CHAPTER IV.

LEM WIGGINS IS LOCATED.

The great touring car soon left the city limits behind, distant as they were from its starting point, and bowled smoothly and powerfully over the roads of Westchester County.

The mood of its occupants was an expectant one.

If Nick's surmises were anywhere near correct, it was quite possible that a brush with several of French Jimmy's gang awaited them at their destination, and previous experience told them what that meant.

As for Johnnie Dugan, while he was as ready for a fight as most of his race, he was much more interested

in the possibility of finding Mamie at the end of the run.

"Supposing there's anything phony about Jimmy's death, who do you imagine this Wiggins is?" Chick asked his chief as they sped along. "One of the gang?"

"Most likely. Perhaps not, though. It depends on how thorough their plans have been. Lebeau is good on detail and may have actually imported a genuine relative for the occasion. That is hardly possible, of course, but it wouldn't surprise me. Even if Wiggins is the real thing, however, I don't believe Hattie is. She may or may not be Mamie, but I'll wager she isn't a simple country girl. Even the fellows down at Bellevue thought she must have lived in a city most of her life."

Nick and Chick had disguised themselves before Dugan's arrival, and Johnnie and Danny now wore convenient little false mustaches, and Jack Wise had assumed a more elaborate make-up on the way, thanks to the resources in that line, which were always a part of the regular equipment of the detective's machine.

Nevertheless, they regretted the necessity of asking their way when they reached White Plains. It was necessary to do so, however.

They were sure, when they reached the town, that they were on the right road so far, for Nick had taken the precaution to ascertain in advance that a coffin had been removed at that station from the train on which the undertaker claimed to have sent Lebeau's body.

But the whereabouts of Lem Wiggins' house was another matter, and the fact that inquiries were being made might easily be telephoned ahead of them.

That could hardly be avoided, however.

The party drove directly to the post office, since one of the rural routes had been the only address given on Wiggins' letter. Fortunately, there was no one in the office when they arrived, except the postmaster and his clerks.

One of the latter directed Nick in regard to the roads covered by Route No. 7, although no one there seemed to know just where Lem Wiggins lived.

But he was obviously well known, at least by name, which was something of a surprise to the detective, who had been prepared to find that the man had made his residence in the White Plains neighborhood solely for the purpose of carrying out the plot which seemed to be on foot.

As a matter of fact, before the detective had left the post office he was in possession of the information that Wiggins had been living out in the country for a year or more, and that he really had a daughter named Hattie.

It began to look as if they might be on a false scent, after all.

They easily found the road described by the postal clerk, and turned into it. At the first house they came to after leaving the town, Nick alighted again and went in to make inquiries. It was then a little after nine, and some of the downstairs windows were still lighted.

A young man came to the door in his shirt sleeves, and, to the detective's relief, promptly gave him the information he desired.

Lem Wiggins lived on that road, about three miles out, in a house known as "the old Parker place." And the detective's informant went on to describe it minutely.

Nick thanked him, made a convincing excuse for his interest in Wiggins, and then carelessly put several questions.

The young fellow was quite ready to talk. He had heard that Wiggins' nephew had died in New York, and had seen the undertaker's wagon pass the house with the body early that evening. He seemed to be unaware, however, of the nephew's identity. He gave it as his opinion that Wiggins was a hard-headed farmer, but implied that he was not very popular in the neighborhood on account of his bluntness and his faculty for antagonizing people.

So far, Nick's theory did not seem to have a leg to stand on.

Everything about Wiggins appeared to be open and aboveboard, and just as might have been expected had there been no reason to suspect his motives.

But the detective was not through yet. He casually mentioned the old man's daughter—Wiggins had been described to him as nearly sixty but "as hard as nails"—and asked what she was like.

"Pretty girl, they tell me," he said. "Black hair, pink cheeks, and a way of looking at you that would make any man eat out of her hand."

The young farmer looked puzzled, and then grinned meaningly.

"Somebody must have been stuffing you!" he told Nick. "Hattie Wiggins has black hair, all right, but she's about as sallow as they make 'em, and as for her way of looking at you, well, I never noticed anything very taking about it, believe me!"

"I must have run across her sweetheart," returned Nick, with a laugh, but, as he took his leave a few moments later, he was surer than ever that he was on the right track, despite all the apparent setbacks he had received.

The description he had given of the supposed Hattie was almost word for word the one which he had received at Bellevue. Obviously, therefore, the real Hattie Wiggins had not claimed the body, and, if not, there could hardly fail to be something queer about the proceeding.

In ten minutes they were approaching the Parker place, and were ready for business.

The house was on a little hill, nearly a quarter of a mile from the main road, but, knowing that there must be a branch road leading up to it, the detective instructed Danny to keep on as rapidly as was safe.

It did not seem worth while to send any one around the house on foot to prevent a get-away, for the chauffeur was used to rough roads, and the car would doubtless be close to the house before it was noticed. And by that time it ought to be too late for the occupants to decamp.

Moreover, if Lebeau were not really dead, he had done something more than merely play possum in order to deceive the hospital physicians, and, in that case, he was not likely to be in a condition that would permit of a hasty flight.

In other words, he must have taken one of the several rare drugs which are occasionally employed to bring on illness and apparent death, and it was probable that he had not yet recovered consciousness.

The shades were drawn, but narrow strips of light showed at the bottoms and sides of several of the windows on the ground floor. The Wiggins household was still astir.

Danny Maloney slowed down as the big gate came into view, and Chick jumped out and ran to open it so that the car need not be stopped, for the sudden cessation of the pur of the engine might be noticed by the inmates of the house.

In a few moments the gate swung open and Chick jumped on the running board as the car passed him. Danny then increased his speed and jolted along up the rough incline of the private road at a good pace.

Fortunately, there was enough moonlight to allow him to get a general idea of the trend of the road without waiting for his big searchlights to pick out the path for him.

The machine had covered nearly half of the distance between the main road and the house when the front door was opened and a man peered out.

"They're on!" muttered Chick.

"Hit her up a little more, Danny!" called his chief, and the car lurched forward at a faster clip.

The door closed hastily, shutting the man inside, and it was easy to imagine that the news he had to impart might be creating a sensation, for he had doubtless seen that the approaching car was well filled with men.

In almost no time, the machine stopped close to the house, and all of its occupants except Danny piled out and strode toward the door.

The chauffeur remained at his post to guard the car against damage or unauthorized use, but was ready to respond instantly to any call for his services elsewhere.

Nick Carter knocked loudly at the door, but it was noticeable that he used his left hand. His right was in the pocket of his dust coat, which bulged significantly.

CHAPTER V.

TAKING CHANCES.

After a little delay, a tall, rawboned, powerfully built man, in his late fifties, opened the door.

He wore a vest, but no coat, and his sleeves were rolled up over his tanned, brawny arms. His leathery face was seamed by exposure, and was partly concealed by a short gray beard. A pair of keen gray eyes looked out sharply from under thick, bushy eyebrows.

"Well, what do you want?" he demanded, in a surly tone.

Further concealment would have been worse than useless, and the disguises had been assumed principally for the purpose of escaping unwelcome attention in White Plains, on the chance that friends of French Jimmy might be on the watch there.

The detective came to the point at once.

"You are Lem Wiggins, I believe?" he asked crisply.

"That's my name."

"I am Nick Carter, the New York detective. I must ask you to let me see the body of Jimmy Lebeau."

"The deuce you must! What for, I'd like to know?"

"I'm not going to mince matters, Wiggins. You may or may not be Lebeau's uncle. If you're not, you certainly know what he was. If you are, you ought to know that he was about everything he ought not to have been. At any rate, I know him so well that I feel obliged to convince myself at firsthand that he is really dead."

"What the deuce do you mean?"

"Precisely what I say. I had a hand in Jimmy's arrest, and I have reason to know that nearly half of his gang are still at large. I did not hear of his death until late this afternoon, too late to do anything in New York. What I learned did not reassure me, for I have known of cases where prisoners have escaped through feigned deaths. I understand that Jimmy has been brought here, and all I ask of you is that you let me see the body. If you are what you claim to be, and everything is regular, you have nothing whatever to fear. If, on the other hand, you oppose me, I shall draw my own conclusions—and act accordingly."

Wiggins seemed to be trembling with suppressed rage.

"Where's your authority?" he growled.

"I don't need any. I am simply asking permission to see the body, which is a privilege you would doubtless grant to your neighbors, if you had nothing to conceal. I'm not suggesting an autopsy or anything of that sort. If Lebeau is not really dead, on the other hand, he is a fugitive, an escaped prisoner, and, as such, no one needs any specific authority to apprehend him, wherever he may be found."

Wiggins' gnarled fingers were working convulsively.

"You've got an almighty nerve!" he grumbled. "Ain't you got any respect for the dead? Jimmy's been bad, I know, but he's gone now, and out of the reach of you bloodhounds. Can't you leave him and us in peace? And what right have you got coming up here and casting slurs on me? It ain't my fault that my only sister's child went to the dogs, is it? It ain't every man that would have sent for the body, let me tell you, and offered to give it decent burial. But I did it for Grace's sake, and this is all the thanks I get!"

"You didn't do it for thanks, did you?" Nick returned quietly. "I'm not saying that you aren't Jimmy's uncle, Wiggins. You may be, for all I know. I suspected at first that you might be a regular member of the gang, but I know better now. That isn't the point, however. The point is: Are you going to consent freely to let us see the body, or must we force our way in and make a scene, against our will? If you're all straight, and haven't been deceived by Jimmy and his mob—which is quite possible—we'll offer you our sincerest apologies for intruding at such a time. This isn't a pleasant duty, I assure, but it must be done, either with or without your consent. Which is it to be?"

The farmer hesitated for a few moments, during which Nick thought he caught the sound of stealthy movements in the rooms beyond, as he had before.

"I suppose I'll have to give in," Wiggins said reluctantly at last. "This butting into a man's house don't make any great hit with me, but I can't fight the whole bunch of you. Maybe I could have once, but I'm getting along in years now, and there ain't nobody but my daughter and me here. You're taking advantage of an old man, that's what you're doing, but one of you come on. I take it the whole parcel of you don't have to rubber at poor Jimmy, eh?"

"I must have two witnesses," Nick said promptly.

"Ain't Hattie and me good enough witnesses?"

"I want independent, unbiased witnesses."

"Humph! The lot of you look unbiased!" Wiggins commented scornfully. "Well, come on, then—three of you—and get it over with, for Heaven's sake! I've had about all I can stand!"

His obvious anxiety to reduce the number of those to be admitted, coupled with the suspicious sounds which

the detective had heard, was not reassuring. Nick made a sign to Chick and Jack Wise, however, and the three filed in past the farmer, who slammed the door in Johnnie Dugan's face.

Nick and his two companions found themselves in a narrow passageway, with doors opening to right and left.

"He's in here," Wiggins remarked, leading the way toward the first door at the right.

He opened it, and Nick stepped warily over the threshold, with the others close at his heels.

A coffin of polished oak stood on the usual trestles in the middle of the room, which was plainly the parlor of the farmhouse, and it was furnished in a stiff, old-fashioned way.

No one else was in the room, but the detective's roving glance at once alighted upon another door, which evidently communicated with the next room. It was slightly ajar.

A second significant fact was that all the windows were tightly closed and the shades drawn, despite the fact that the weather was still rather warm.

"With an unembalmed body in the house, at this time of year, the average farmer's family would have every window in the room wide open—and wisely, too," Nick commented inwardly as he advanced toward the coffin.

The upper part of the lid had been removed, but the slide of plate glass was in place. Under it, with hands folded placidly on its breast, lay the body of a man.

It was undoubtedly that of French Jimmy Lebeau, and there seemed to be no reason to doubt that death was present, to judge by its appearance.

Hands and face were bloodless, and they bore a pinched look, as if from a long illness.

But Lebeau had been in robust health until two or three days before.

Wiggins had followed his three unwelcome visitors into the room, and he now stood on the other side of the casket, looking at them with a leer of satisfaction on his homely face.

"Well, do you recognize him? Are you satisfied now?" he asked triumphantly.

"There is no doubt about the identity. I did not suppose there would be," Nick replied. "As for being satisfied, however, that's another matter. The physicians who had charge of him at Bellevue have pronounced him dead, after all their experience and the opportunities they had to study his illness step by step and to examine the body afterward——"

"Well, then, ain't that and this good enough for you?" Wiggins broke in.

"No, I was about to say it wasn't. If the doctors have allowed themselves to be hoodwinked, that is all the more reason why I should be thorough."

As the detective spoke, he took a small leather case from his pocket. When he raised the lid, a glittering row of little steel instruments was revealed. Nick had put out one hand to lower the glass slide when the farmer leaned threateningly over the coffin.

"None of that!" he commanded. "You said you only wanted to see the body, or I wouldn't have let you in a step. You've seen it and now out you go! You ain't got a mite of authority to go mutilating that poor fellow's body, no matter what he was in life, and I ain't going to stand for it! Get that? Then get out!"

The door into the next room creaked ominously just then, but Nick's hand on the glass did not falter.

"That door needs oiling, Chick," he said, nodding toward it. "See to the other one, Jack."

And he started to slide the glass away as his assistants sprang for the doors.

With a veritable bellow of rage, Wiggins lunged at him across the casket.

CHAPTER VI.

DESPERATE STRAITS.

There was no longer any reason for supposing that a chamber of death was being desecrated, and the quiet room was instantly transformed into a scene of raging strife.

Nick stepped aside and allowed the farmer's powerful blow to buffet the air beside him. As he did so, he laid his instruments down on the coffin and whipped out his automatic.

The act came none too soon, for Wiggins had drawn a revolver with his left hand at the same time that he struck out so viciously with his right.

"Drop that gun!" the detective commanded sternly.

He had been a little too quick for the older man, whose eyes wavered before Nick's steady gaze and steadier automatic.

But the detective's advantage was a fleeting one. A second later he was overwhelmed by a rush from behind and thrown headlong across the casket and into the farmer's arms.

Chick and Jack Wise had found more than they had bargained for.

They had taken their chief's hint instantly. The former had made for the door that was ajar, the other for the open door leading into the hall. But before either could quite reach his post, the two openings had vomited forth a crowd of armed men.

Ever since their entrance, the detectives had been morally certain that some of Lebeau's gang were hidden in the place, but they could not turn back, and they had not expected to be confronted by any such number of desperadoes.

Five or six of the rascals launched themselves through each door and fell upon the two assistants with snarls of fury.

They came with clubbed weapons, and the mere weight of their numbers and the momentum of their unexpected rush sent Chick and Jack spinning before them.

As a matter of fact, it was Jack Wise who cannoned into his chief, by no means willingly, as he was swept forward like a leaf in a gale.

The rush overturned the coffin, which fell on its side with a crash of glass. Nick went down with it and caught a glimpse of the body rolling over stiffly, utterly unresponsive to the turmoil which was in progress above it.

It was as Nick had suspected. Jimmy had not yet recovered consciousness, and he could, therefore, take no part in the fight which was being waged for and against him.

Wiggins had also clubbed his big revolver, and he brought the heavy butt down on Nick's head before the latter could prevent it. As luck would have it, however, the hasty blow was ill directed, and the detective suffered no great harm.

But the pain roused his fighting spirit more than anything else, and he scrambled to his feet across the dam-

aged casket, in spite of the fact that two or three of the gang were trying to pull him back.

His small automatic would, ordinarily, have been of little use as a club, but with Nick's arm behind it it was not to be despised. He brought it down on the farmer's head with a skill and strength which left little doubt of the result.

Wiggins caved in at the knees and fell in a heap, while the detective wheeled about, the butt of his pistol in his hand again. His assistants were writhing under the piled-up forms of their assailants, and it would have been folly for him to go to their aid, especially as several others were advancing menacingly toward him.

They seemed to be intent upon capturing him alive, for some reason, for none of them showed any inclination to fire.

Not wishing to be flanked, as he was in imminent danger of being, the detective backed against the wall beside one of the windows, from which point of vantage he threatened his enemies with his automatic.

"Stop where you are," he demanded, "or there'll be some dead rascals around here!"

Those directly in front of him sank down behind the coffin, which, being on its side, formed an effective breastwork. Others, however, continued to slink forward, circling about furtively to right and left of him.

He was outnumbered, and in desperate straits. The lurking scoundrels behind the coffin were only a few feet away and could fire at point-blank range whenever they chose. The others were approaching him on both sides. He could doubtless pick off one or two of them, but, while he was attending to those on one side, the others could pounce upon him unhindered.

The stealthy movement proceeded, in spite of Nick's warning. The detective had produced another weapon now, and he held one in each hand, but he could only aim in one direction at a time.

In a few moments he was obliged to let drive at the nearest man on his left, who was in advance of all the others.

The fellow collapsed with a look of pained surprise, but the advance was not stayed.

One of Nick's automatics spoke sharply again, this time the one in his right hand, and the leader on that side threw up his hands and fell backward against the man just behind him.

The latter pushed his wounded companion aside and let him fall, leaping over his legs and reversing his weapon as he did so.

The loss of two of the gang had plainly aroused murder in the hearts of all of those who were left, for every butt quickly disappeared into a big fist, and at least five muzzles were trained on the detective, from both sides and in front.

It looked as if he could not possibly survive the volley which was certain to follow, and neither Chick nor Jack were in a position to help him, any more than he had been to help them. In fact, they were fast being overpowered.

But the detective had other friends, who now made it plain that they would have to be reckoned with.

Without warning, the window beside him crashed inward, the shade was torn aside, and three revolvers were thrust through the opening.

The fellow who had thrown his wounded comrade aside in his mad haste to get at Nick, and the man who was behind him, were in front of this window at the time.

One of them went down, thanks to a shot from one of Danny Maloney's weapons, while the other dove across the casket and took refuge behind it, pursued by a pellet of lead from Johnnie's borrowed gun.

That changed the situation materially, for it cleared Nick's right side of enemies, and enabled the detective to devote himself to the remaining gangster on his left.

The fellow cringed back when he saw the turn affairs had taken, but Nick left the wall and sprang at him. The detective's object was twofold. He naturally wished to put another of the robbers out of commission if he could, but he also hoped, that, if he engaged the fellow at close quarters, the little garrison behind the overturned coffin would not dare to fire at him for fear of killing one of their own number.

As a matter of fact, they were too busy just then exchanging shots with Danny and Dugan to pay much attention to Nick's movements.

The detective kept the fellow covered as he advanced, having dropped his right-hand revolver into his pocket. In a moment more the gangster had backed into a corner, and he could retreat no farther.

Knowing Nick's trigger reputation, the rascal did not venture to shoot. He was badly scared at finding himself opposed, single-handed, to the redoubtable detective, and the others were too much preoccupied to come to his assistance. Hence he was easy prey.

The detective drove his right fist into his face, the man's head snapped back against the wall, and he slid down, receiving, as he fell, an extra clout for good measure.

Nick then turned his attention to the others.

It was well that he did, for Jack Wise had been pummeled and kicked into insensibility by three of the gang, who were now free to turn their attention elsewhere.

Nick saw them making for him, and out popped his other weapon. Before he could fire, however, Johnnie Dugan dropped one of them, and the others bolted for the shelter of the coffin barricade, which they shifted around a little so that it would protect them from Nick's fire, as well as that of Maloney and Dugan.

There must have been five men crowded in behind the casket by that time, and three others were putting the finishing touches on poor Chick, who had kept their hands full for some time.

Nick had shot two and knocked one out, not counting Lem Wiggins. Danny and Johnnie had each laid one low. It was clear, therefore, that others must have slipped into the room after the first rush, and that the detective's little force of five, including himself, had been opposed to something like fourteen.

Eight of these still remained to be dealt with, and five of them were intrenched behind French Jimmy's temporary habitation.

Even if there were no others about the place, it looked decidedly hopeless for Nick, who was now left with only a couple of volunteer helpers.

Moreover, there was no effective shelter within the detective's reach.

CHAPTER VII.

HOLDING THE FORT.

A small, round, flimsily constructed table was all that was handy.

It was concealed by an old-fashioned patchwork cover of silk, and it was laden with all sorts of knickknacks, but Nick ruthlessly overturned it, tore off the cover, and dodged behind it, just in time to escape a fusillade of shots.

Simultaneously, Chick's successful assailants finished their work and started to drag their victim through the near-by door into the next room.

Nick and his men had not cared to risk a shot at them before, fearing they might hit Chick, but now, when the rascals straightened, the detective took careful, but hasty, aim, and fired.

One of the fellows doubled up over Chick's unconscious body, while the rest dropped their burden and bolted through the door. As it partly closed behind them, Danny and Johnnie knocked some splinters out of it by way of showing that they were still on the job.

All of those composing the two opposing parties were now under cover, for the two who had just disappeared through the door returned the fire from behind it.

It seemed to be a case of locked horns, despite the inequality in numbers.

It was three against seven now, but, as things were, it might just about as well be two against seven, and the third man could be used more advantageously elsewhere.

Nick did not hesitate long.

"Danny, make a dash for town," he called out. "It's the county seat. Bring the sheriff and a posse out here as quick as you can."

"Sure, if you can get along without me," came the ready reply.

"We'll have to. Give Johnnie one of your guns."

It was unfortunate that Nick was obliged to give the chauffeur his orders in the hearing of the gang, but it could not be avoided. Had it been one of his assistants, instead of Danny, he could have drummed out a message without fear of its being understood by his enemies.

To be sure, his orders might throw a scare into the ranks of the gangsters, but it was much more probable that they would nerve them with the desperation of fear, and make them determined to finish with the detective before the arrival of the sheriff, if it lay in their power to do so.

"Well, so be it!" thought Nick, as he realized this.

Suddenly, however, he remembered that the two scoundrels in the next room could easily creep out of the house and take young Dugan in the rear, without any one being able to stop them.

Instantly his mind was made up. He was not willing to expose the Irishman to any such fate, and, if possible, he did not wish Dugan to be recognized by the gang, for fear of subsequent foul play. He would have to hold the gang at bay alone as long as he could, and take the consequences.

His position might be worse. He had a table, such as it was, in front of him, and a wall behind him. With his two automatics, plenty of ammunition, and the skill and resourcefulness of long experience, he ought to be able to give a good account of himself, even against seven bloodthirsty men.

"Go with Danny, Johnnie," he called out. "Don't ask any questions, but go. They may try to stop the car, and you can protect him while he drives."

That was more or less of an excuse to get rid of Dugan.

It worked, as it happened. Johnnie reluctantly took the bait and turned away from the window—not, however, until he had another reason for doing so beside Nick's self-sacrificing directions.

The additional reason had presented itself quickly in the shape of a sally on the part of the two whom Nick had feared.

There is no means of knowing whether they took the hint which the detective was obliged to give, in order to get rid of Dugan, or whether they had already been alive to the possibility of stopping the chauffeur, but it is more than probable that the latter was the case, in view of the threatening nature of Danny's errand.

At any rate, they came tearing out of the house while Johnnie was still hesitating uncertainly outside of the window.

Danny was already in the car, but seemed to be having some sort of difficulty with it. Both of the outlaws started toward the machine on a dead run, but one of them kept an eye on Dugan, over his shoulder.

When Johnnie saw them, he gave chase at once, reckless of consequences, and firing as he ran. The revolvers were ineffective in his unpracticed hands, but, fortunately, the robber's divided attention made his fire no more deadly.

Danny gave up his attempts to start the machine, and, firing across the back of the driver's seat, made one of the gangsters bite the dust. The other one, not liking this reception, swerved aside and dove behind a watering trough.

But Maloney's Irish was up now, and he leaped from the machine and started recklessly toward the trough.

"Head him off on the other side!" he called to Dugan. "We'll even things up a little for the chief before I go, anyway!"

Johnnie was by no means loath to follow directions, and immediately began to skirt around the trough the opposite way.

They were fired on repeatedly, but the rascal was excited, and his aim was bad. They kept on their feet and sprang behind the trough at practically the same moment.

Danny was a little in advance, however, and it was his buffet which laid the gangster low. The chauffeur cut down a section of the clothesline, which was hanging close at hand, and, with a few deft turns of it, tied the unconscious man to the trough. As the other was wounded, they decided that no more precautions were necessary to keep him from taking any very active part thereafter.

"There's something the matter with the blamed machine!" Danny confided to Dugan, in a low tone. "I haven't had time yet to find out what it is, but I guess somebody's been monkeying with it, confound 'em! Run back and help the chief, though."

"But he told me to come with you—that he'd be all right."

"Then do as he says—but hanged if I know what he means by it! I don't need you."

His renewed investigation, however, soon proved to Danny that the gasoline tank had been emptied while he had been taking part in the fight inside. The gasoline had

been drawn off and carried away, which explained why he had not detected the odor on the ground.

The chauffeur was in a rage, but he did not let his anger get the best of his judgment. It was apparent to him at once that, since the car was out of commission, Johnnie could just as well go for the sheriff as he could.

He shrewdly suspected that Nick had sent the overzealous volunteer away in order to shield him as much as possible. Besides, Danny did not need to be conceited to feel that the detective would rather have him on the ground than an outsider.

Hence he lost no time in sending Johnnie on a scouting trip to the barn to see if he could find a horse.

"If you can't," the chauffeur told him, "you'll have to leg it to the nearest farmhouse, back the way we came, and see if they have a telephone or a nag you can borrow or steal. Call up the sheriff if you can. If not, beat it for town on the run!"

Maloney then crept back toward the house, wishing that he could lay hands on the person who had made away with his precious "gas."

He crawled close enough to the broken window to see that it was still a drawn game in the room, with Nick behind his round table, and the remaining five gangsters huddled, presumably, beyond their gruesome barricade.

But Danny had no intention of manning the window again. Its position was not quite advantageous enough, under present conditions, to suit him. Instead, he made his way to the door through which the two rascals had made their unsuccessful sally.

It was closed when he first caught a near view of it, and he thought he heard a key grate in the lock.

He reflected that it was not likely that the gangsters who had run out had stopped to close it behind them, but, of course, it was possible that the thus-far-unseen Hattie Wiggins had shut it.

She ought to be upstairs somewhere, under a bed, but she might not be. Or the door might have been closed by the mysterious young woman who had impersonated the farmer's daughter. He had heard Nick and his assistants discussing her, and had jumped to the conclusion that it was she who had locked the door when she saw that her friends had been worsted, and that one of the detective's men was approaching.

"Well, I guess I can handle her," he thought, with a chuckle. "She doesn't seem very anxious to mix into the scrap, anyway."

With that he laid his hand on the knob. To his amazement, the door yielded at once. If any one had recently turned the key, it had been to unlock the door rather than to lock it.

"What do you know about that now!" Maloney exclaimed to himself.

Without more ado, however, he pushed the door open and entered the unlighted room.

His plan was to reach the door between the parlor and the room immediately adjoining, for from that position he could command the space on the other side of the overturned coffin and make the place too hot to hold the five scoundrels who were ambushed there.

They would then be between two fires, his and the detective's, and would have to make a dash for the hall, or else surrender.

It was a good idea, and Danny was exceedingly proud of it. He had helped Nick and the others in many a pinch, and had repeatedly earned the detective's commendation, but never, he believed, had such an opportunity to distinguish himself come his way.

He was so preoccupied with the thought of what he was going to do to those five men that it never occurred to him that there might be more than a couple of girls elsewhere in the house, and still unaccounted for.

He was certainly not to blame for that, for even Nick assumed that all of the gang who had rendezvoused at the farm had taken part in the fight. Any other supposition would have seemed too far-fetched for consideration, after all that had taken place.

Be that as it may, the fact is that Danny Maloney had barely stepped across the threshold before a crushing blow descended upon his head and sent him headlong into unconsciousness.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TIDE TURNS.

Nick Carter knew that something must be wrong outside the farmhouse, and he feared the worst.

He had been listening for the welcome sound of the motor, when several shots had jarred on his ears, instead. When these ceased, he had again strained his ears for the noise of the departing car, hoping that Danny and Dugan had beaten off their assailants.

When all remained still, he was forced to conclude that the two young Irishmen had either been captured or shot down. It was a very distasteful thought, but it did not happen to occur to him that the car might have been tampered with in advance.

Whatever had happened, the detective was evidently all alone, as he had planned, with at least five men vowing vengeance on him from their strange shelter a few feet away. Besides, he had made up his mind that no help would be forthcoming.

Nevertheless, he took a grim satisfaction in the fact that Lebeau, whose rigid, deathlike form he could plainly see through the shattered glass, seemed to be no nearer to taking part in the fracas than he had been in the beginning.

It was a curious situation.

Nick's improvised shelter appeared to be absurdly inadequate. It hardly hid his crouching body, and the wood of the table top, which was now his shield, was scarcely more than an inch thick. It was of good, honest black walnut, on the other hand, and there was small likelihood that a bullet would pierce it.

The detective stayed well out of sight behind it, and reserved his fire.

As for the gangsters, they were packed in so closely behind the six feet or so of coffin that they could hardly move without running the risk of pushing the end men into Nick's view.

They seemed to have no stomach for a rush, having doubtless seen too many of their fellows go down. They whispered together and scraped the floor threateningly, like a lot of boys, but when it came to jumping up and facing the twenty shots of those two automatics, they evidently begged to be excused.

If Nick had had any reason to believe that either Danny or Johnnie Dugan had broken through and gone for the sheriff, even on foot, he might have entertained the hope that he could hold the fort until the posse's arrival.

But there was a disagreeable surprise in store for him.

The floor of the next room presently creaked, the door moved slightly, and a dark-skinned face peered through the crack for a second and then disappeared.

The detective had ventured a peep around the corner of the table, and he had caught a momentary glimpse of the face, but had not fired. He did not know whether it belonged to a friend or a foe, although he strongly suspected that the latter was the case.

He knew soon enough, for a gruff voice called out from the next room.

"Why in brimstone don't you fools snow him under?" it demanded contemptuously. "What do you think you're doing? Fishing for wild ducks, or what?"

"Come and do it yourself!" challenged one of the men behind the coffin.

"By Ned, I will!" came the answer. "We ain't got all night to can that cursed gum shoer."

It looked as if the man in the next room must have some authority, probably newly acquired since French Jimmy and his two lieutenants had been out of the running.

Nick heard some heavy piece of furniture being rolled across the floor. In a few moments the door opened wide and a chiffonier was pushed across the threshold by unseen hands.

The new leader was something of a strategist, it appeared, and did not mean to expose himself any more than was necessary until the time came.

The chiffonier rumbled into the room sidewise, and was then turned around until the wider front faced the detective. The light on it was brighter now, and Nick saw one of the fellow's hands at one side.

He fired at it, and drew a startled curse from the rascal. The hand was quickly withdrawn, and the detective was satisfied that he had at least damaged it slightly.

The chiffonier continued to advance, however, until it was close behind the casket, and also hid the doorway.

"Now, one of you guys rustle back there and take my place," the new arrival ordered.

The detective could tell from the sound that the man had stooped down and was crawling from one shelter to the other, but the ruffian had learned wisdom by experience, and he did not expose any part of himself again.

There was considerable rustling and moving about behind the coffin as the two men changed places, and one of them retreated under cover to the door, but Nick did not get an opportunity to plant another shot.

"Now, Mr. Nick Carter, you're at the end of your halter," the voice of the newcomer sang out confidently. "The real doings is going to begin right now."

"Is that so?" Nick inquired calmly. "I'm curious to see what is coming."

"You'll see, all right—take it from me!" boasted the gangster. "Ready boys? Then let her go!"

The coffin began to move slowly toward Nick, one end being advanced a few inches, and then the other. And the chiffonier followed it.

There was no more uncertainty in Nick's mind as to the scoundrel's purpose. Clearly the plan was to push the two movable barriers close to the detective's shelter, and then to leap upon him in such numbers and at such close range that he would have a minimum chance, if any, to use his weapons before he was borne down by the combined weight of his opponents.

If the ruse succeeded, it would, indeed, be all over with the detective. But Nick did not intend that it should, if he could help it, and he thought he saw a way to prevent it.

"Do you want me to put a bullet through French Jimmy's head?" he called out meaningly. "I couldn't miss him, and you're pushing him nearer all the time. If you shove that thing a foot closer, I'll make sure that Lebeau will stay dead!"

The casket had come to a stop immediately at Nick's first words, and it did not resume its uneven progress.

Instead, a whispered consultation took place. The gangsters had met with a disagreeable surprise. Apparently it had never occurred to them, throughout the whole proceedings, that their helpless and unconscious leader had been fully exposed all the time, and that Nick or his men could at any time have removed all doubts in regard to the genuineness of Lebeau's supposed death.

Or a stray shot might have done it just as effectually.

It was barely possible that they had counted on the detective's well-known scruples to prevent him from taking such a course in the case of a seemingly dead body, and, if so, they had paid him about as great a compliment as they were capable of. Nick doubted that, however, and was inclined to believe that they had so far failed to realize the situation.

The hurried conference ceased, and the new leader's voice was raised again.

"Thought you had us that time, didn't you, old pussyfoot?" he asked. "Well, you've got another think coming. Get busy, Ike!"

To the detective's surprise, the chiffonier, which was a couple of feet behind the head of the coffin, suddenly toppled forward across the latter, and was boosted up and over until it slid down, upside down, across the front of the casket, completely shutting off his view of the still form behind the shattered glass.

Before he had guessed the meaning of this maneuver, it was already too late to carry his threat into execution. Besides, that had been largely in the nature of a bluff, and it is extremely doubtful that he could have brought himself to fire, under the circumstances. He had a prejudice in favor of warring only with men on their feet, not with dead men or those who were as good as dead for the time being.

At any rate, his threat had come to naught, and the opportunity had slipped away, never to return.

The coffin was now no more than four feet from his flimsy table, and even if the bulky chiffonier prevented it from being pushed any nearer, the gangsters could cover that distance in a fraction of a second, with the loss of only one man, at most, if they had the nerve.

Their new leader seemed to have that requisite quality, and would doubtless lose no time in driving the others to the attack, if they were not ready to go willingly.

Things looked black for Nick.

CHAPTER IX.

DUGAN GOES FOR THE SHERIFF.

To make matters worse, the coffin started once more to advance.

The foot was being pushed around, while the head, weighted down by the overturned chiffonier, remained almost stationary.

This change of tactics boded ill for the detective, as it brought the gangsters' gruesome barrier around in such a way that the rascals at that end were soon within less than three feet of Nick, and in a position to dash around behind his light shelter.

The detective shifted his table slightly in order to keep it nearly parallel with the coffin, but he had hardly done so before he found himself absolutely defenseless.

Some one, probably the leader, had suddenly reached across the casket, grasped the upper edge of the little table, and pulled it toward him.

Nick tried to retain it, but it was wrested from his grasp. The next instant five of Lebeau's mob swarmed over and around the now useless shelter, and threw themselves upon the detective.

Nick fired twice, letting go with both weapons almost simultaneously, but there was no time to aim.

One of the gang staggered aside, stumbled and fell, but there was no indication that the other bullet had taken effect.

The detective fought gallantly and tirelessly, but, although he threw off one man after another, he was soon subdued, the breath literally having been knocked out of him under the pitiless knees of his enemies.

The gangsters gave vent to fierce whoops of delight when Nick went limp. They kicked him in the ribs and repeatedly struck his unconscious face, until their new leader, who seemed to answer to the names of Baxter Tom and Murray, ordered them to desist.

The detective was then bound hand and foot, dragged over the floor, and piled up, like a stick of cordwood, on top of his two assistants.

Two or three of the victors wanted to make an end of the detectives then and there, but Murray silenced them in short order. Obviously, he was not ready, for some reason, to follow up his advantage at once, although he must have known that one of Nick's party had disappeared, and that the sheriff might be expected to descend on the place before long.

Probably one reason for the delay was his anxiety to get French Jimmy on his feet again, for they now removed Lebeau from the coffin, and two of them set to work to revive him, while the others devoted themselves to their wounded.

* * * * * * *

It was ten minutes before Johnnie Dugan reached the next farmhouse on the road back to White Plains. The family had retired for the night, but he gained entrance, after some delay, and was given access to the phone, with which, luckily, the house was equipped.

The sheriff was attending a lodge meeting, the young Irishman was told, but he was reached at length. Dugan's information was calculated to cause a stir at the other end of the wire, and it evidently did so.

The sheriff was plainly excited by the importance of the occasion and the urgency of the need. He said that one of his deputies was present, being a member of the same lodge, and that he could easily reach one other.

He promised to swear in a number of special deputies, chosen from the lodge members, hustle them all into a big touring car, and start within ten or fifteen minutes.

That was the best that Johnnie could hope for, but he hung up the receiver reluctantly. If there had been a couple of able-bodied men there, or even one, he would have tried to get somebody to return with him, but it happened that only one old man was home that night.

There were no other houses near at hand, unfortunately, and, therefore, Dugan was obliged to turn back alone. He did not mean to walk into a trap if he could help it, although he hoped that things had remained about as they were. So far as he knew, Danny had been on hand to help the detective if the latter was hard pressed at any time.

Nevertheless, he felt it necessary for him to reach Wiggins' house ahead of the sheriff's party and see how the land lay. He tried to borrow a horse, but the farmers did not feel sure enough of him to agree to that, and Johnnie did not have enough money with him to talk business. As a result, he was obliged to walk back—as he had come, for he had found nothing more than a cow in Wiggins' stable.

He was more familiar with the road now, and made a little better time, despite the fact that he was tired from running most of the distance, in the first place.

When he came within sight of the house, he slowed down and proceeded with caution, knowing that he could not expect to cope with the rascals if they had already gained the upper hand of Nick and the chauffeur.

There did not seem to be a single light in the house, but as he approached a form slunk out of the side door and hurried toward a near-by patch of woods, away from the road.

Johnnie ached to give chase, but he was not near enough to do so successfully, and, besides, he did not know what might be going on. If anything had happened to the detective and Danny, he was the only one left who could give the sheriff a detailed account of what had happened, and he must not allow himself to fall into the hands of the gang if he could prevent it.

The figure disappeared in the shadow of the woods, legging it at a swift pace over the uneven ground, and nothing else occurred to attract Dugan's attention. He waited for perhaps five minutes in the shelter of a big apple tree in the orchard, and then resumed his stealthy approach.

He was at a loss to know what to do. The house looked deserted, and not a sound broke the stillness, except the distant barking of a dog. If the gang had been driven off, Nick would surely have had no reason to extinguish all the lights. It looked, therefore, as if the fight had ended disastrously for the detective.

But was the gang still there, lurking in the dark house and defiantly awaiting the approach of the sheriff's posse? If so, Johnnie would be stepping into the lions' cage if he went too near.

On the other hand, the man he had seen might be the belated rear guard of a band of fugitives, the others having already fled, leaving the detective and his assistants dead or dying.

In that case, precious moments would be wasted, unless Dugan learned the exact situation at once.

That sort of a fighting game, at least, was new to the young Irishman, but he was no coward. He quickly decided that it was his duty to investigate immediately, come what would.

He made as little noise as he could, and he exposed himself as little as necessary in approaching the house, but he did not halt again. Unmolested, he reached the side door, halted, listened, and finally tried the knob.

The door was locked. So were the front and back doors, as he quickly ascertained. He had heard no sound of life within, and was emboldened to try one of the windows. It proved to be unfastened. Johnnie raised it as quietly as he could and climbed in. His heart was pounding, but, after straining his ears again, he struck a match.

It was the dining room, and proved to be directly back of the parlor, the connecting door having been used more than once that night. Dugan found a small lamp on the table, the chimney of which was still warm. He lighted it and entered the next room.

The sight of the coffin gave him a slight start. It was still lying on its side, but had been moved since he saw it last. Moreover, it was empty.

"By George, they must have revived that beast Lebeau!" he muttered under his breath. "But where is Mr. Carter, and where are the rest? Something terrible must have happened!"

Before the sheriff arrived, about twenty minutes later, he had searched the house from attic to cellar, without finding any one, either dead or alive.

Friends and foes were both missing, had mysteriously disappeared, and there seemed to be no way of telling what had happened, except that the tide of battle had gone against Nick.

There was a great deal of blood on the parlor floor and elsewhere, to be sure, but that might all be accounted for, theoretically, by remembering the number of gangsters who had been wounded.

Johnnie had just gone outside, and discovered that the two whom he and Danny had temporarily disposed of had likewise vanished, when he saw a big, crowded touring car come to a halt at the distant gate.

The sheriff had evidently come at last, but Johnnie had little faith that he could right things when they seemed to be so tragically wrong.

CHAPTER X.

FATSY TO THE FORE.

As a matter of fact, the sheriff's coming made the young Irishman more hopeless than ever, if that were possible.

The former, whose name was Briscoe, was a pompous individual, with a self-confident air, who insisted upon taking his time, and this nearly drove Johnnie frantic.

Although Dugan assured him repeatedly that he had searched the house from top to bottom, and that he had seen a man, who must have been one of the gang, take to the woods, Briscoe persisted in making another tedious search before he would listen to Dugan's pleadings or make any move toward pursuing the fugitives.

He also put Johnnie through a lengthy catechism, and again and again expressed his displeasure at the fact that Nick had "invaded his country," as he expressed it, without his august permission.

Altogether, it was at least half an hour before the sheriff was ready to move on, and even then he announced his intention to take the car and more than half of his little posse and roam at large over the landscape, on the chance that he might pick up a clew.

That left his chief deputy and only two men to accompany Dugan on the latter's search for a trail in the woods, where he had seen the man disappear, which was the only real clew they had.

Briscoe's explanation of this strange procedure was that it was more important to head the gang off, if possible, at one of the nearest railroad stations than it was to indulge in a stern chase; but the deputy confided to Johnnie that the sheriff was too fat to indulge in cross-country runs.

The upshot of it was that the gang, or rather the remnants of it, got away without any difficulty.

Johnnie's party found that the fugitives had evidently made for another road, which ran back of the Wiggins house, and was about half a mile away.

There was reason to believe that a car had been waiting for them there, concealed in a big haystack, close to the road. At any rate, they found tracks of wheels in the grass, with wisps of hay scattered about between a demolished stack and the road, and the latter revealed tire marks leading from the field, and heading toward New York.

It seemed likely that some of the gang, at least, had ridden from the city in the machine, and had concealed it there, to be used if a quick get-away should prove necessary.

Nick, or one of his assistants, would doubtless have traced the car from that point, but the task was beyond Johnnie Dugan and the deputy sheriff. The latter went to the nearest farmhouse and telephoned to the police in New York, and in the two or three of the towns and villages along the way, but, as he had no description of the car, it was only so much energy wasted.

Dugan was almost beside himself with anxiety and impatience. He saw that he could not count on Sheriff Briscoe in any way, and that it was useless to remain any longer with the deputy's party. He did not have the faintest idea of what he was going to do, but he was eager to shake off his companions and try to think the thing out for himself.

When he suggested that they separate, however, he was dumfounded to be told that he would have to return to White Plains and be locked up as a material witness until an investigation into the truth of his story could be made.

All of his indignant protests went for naught. He found himself virtually a prisoner, and was obliged to turn back to Wiggins' house. About an hour and a half later, the sheriff reappeared, empty-handed, and the whole party returned to the county seat.

Dugan was sufficiently well informed to know that there was nothing unusual about his plight. He was unknown and there was no one to vouch for his story. It was he who had sent for the sheriff, of course, as the people at the farmhouse where he had telephoned could testify, but that did not prove anything.

He did not blame the sheriff for his detention, and, to do Briscoe justice, things were made as easy for the young Irishman as possible. But it seemed almost unbearable to Johnnie that his hands should be tied at a time when delay might have such appalling consequences.

At last, however, just as the apologetic sheriff was about to lock him up in a cell for the night, he had an inspiration. He asked and received permission to call up Nick Carter's house on the long distance.

Joseph answered the phone, as Johnnie had anticipated. He informed Dugan that Patsy was away that night, he did not know where. But Johnnie knew, for Nick had told him that his second assistant was shadowing the undertaking rooms on Second Avenue.

Hicks' place was well known to him.

Accordingly, he told Joseph enough of the situation to make that faithful servant gasp, and then asked that every effort be made to reach Patsy as soon as possible, and to send him posthaste to White Plains.

Joseph promised to do so, and Dugan felt that he had accomplished something, at least. With Patsy Garvan on the ground, he was sure that things would begin to move.

Sheriff Briscoe had overheard him at the phone, and the nature of the message had gone far to convince the official that Johnnie was what he claimed to be, nevertheless the latter was locked up as a formal precaution.

It was then nearly one o'clock in the morning. Patsy reached White Plains in another of the detective's cars at four o'clock, bringing with him Ida Jones.

That little woman, as capable as she was pretty, had been aroused by Joseph when it looked as if Patsy could not be located, and she was on the point of starting off alone when Garvan put in an appearance.

They drove direct to the sheriff's residence, which adjoined the jail. Briscoe was routed out of bed and his voluble explanations cut short by a businesslike request for Johnnie Dugan's immediate release.

The sheriff had often heard of Patsy, and he could not doubt his identity. Therefore he readily agreed, and Johnnie was soon free and excitedly pouring out his story.

The three soon started for the old Parker place without waiting for daylight, Patsy having courteously but firmly declined all proffers of assistance on the part of Briscoe.

Dawn was approaching, however, by the time they reached the farm, and it was decided to delay the beginning of their systematic search for clews until the light was better.

The house was first scrutinized carefully by the practiced eyes of Patsy and Ida, and the final scenes were reconstructed to a large extent.

"The chief certainly got his, in one way or another," Garvan commented gravely, as he studied the position of the various objects in the parlor. "Here's where you say he was when you left—behind this table, with his back to the wall. And the coffin was over there, opposite the window through which you and Danny had been firing. Well, you see what happened. Those rascals played the old trick of pushing their movable breastwork ahead of them until they were within easy striking distance. The casket and the chief's table are now almost touching, and the latter is overturned. There are signs of a rousing tussle here, and —yes, by George, here are the chief's automatics, both of them! See, Ida, you can tell them by his cipher engraved on the butts. But I'll be hanged if I can tell what they did with him. There's blood all over, but you shot up enough of the gang to explain that."

"And what did they do with all of their wounded?" put in Nick's woman assistant. "Johnnie says he didn't see any blood to amount to anything on the trail over to the other road, and it isn't likely anyway that they would have burdened themselves with all those who had been shot. That would have been too suspicious, and would most certainly have resulted in the capture of the whole party. Besides, some of them may have been dead, in spite of the fact that none of our men presumably shot to kill. What could they have done with the dead and wounded? Something tells me, Patsy, that there is a secret about this place somewhere, and if we can find it out I shouldn't be surprised to find some prisoners at the same time, and, perhaps, all of them. If French Jimmy and the rest thought they had a good place to hide them, where they wouldn't be likely to be found for a long time, they might have decided not to kill them."

Patsy looked at her admiringly.

"Two heads are better than one, if one is a woman's," he murmured, with a grin. "You're all to the good, Ida! I don't see anything wrong with that reasoning of yours, and I hope to goodness you're right, provided we can find the key in time."

CHAPTER XI.

TWELVE IN A GRAVE.

Following Ida's hint, they concentrated most of their attention on the bloodstains, beginning with the parlor, in an effort to determine, if possible, whether they could discover a common trail leading to some place of concealment, either in the house or outside of it.

But they found nothing of the sort.

The blood was most in evidence in the parlor, as was natural, and there was a bloody trail leading into the house from the spot where Danny had shot the fellow who was running toward the car; but no bloodstained track led away from the house, and, try as they might, they could find no secret nook inside of or under the building.

"They must have been uncommonly foxy," commented Patsy, "and that suggests, among other things, that Lebeau must have come to and directed the get-away, for I don't believe any of the others could have turned the trick so cleverly."

Unless they were very much at fault, the building itself did not hold the secret which they were so eager to penetrate. Consequently, the next logical step was to search for evidences that a trail of that nature had been obliterated.

In this they were more successful. They found abundant proof that footsteps had been brushed over, apparently with a hearth brush. But the trouble was that they hit upon so much evidence of this sort that they were at a loss to know how to interpret it, and were obliged to come to the conclusion that a lot of it had been manufactured for the purpose of baffling pursuit.

It was tedious work, but gradually they found it possible to eliminate many of the marks of obliteration, which they classed as unrelated, or mere blinds.

"They must have been very busy with lanterns out here, while you were away, Johnnie," observed Ida. "If there were only some near neighbors, or we could find any one who had seen them at work, from a distance! But that's out of the question, I suppose."

Finally, their painstaking search narrowed down and brought them, after many false starts and aggravating disappointments, to a plot of newly sodded ground, at the back and to one side of the house, and perhaps two hundred yards distant. At a little distance it looked just the same as the surrounding grass.

Patsy's face grew long when he realized what they had found.

"I don't like the looks of this!" he exclaimed soberly. "It looks altogether too much like a big grave to suit me."

The patch of turf was quite extensive, and, although it had obviously been laid very recently, since the last

rain, there did not seem to be any indications that the work had been done during the night.

In fact, the turf had been put down so carefully that it would have been folly to suppose that all of it, at any rate, had been done in the dark, with the possibility of the sheriff's posse arriving at any moment.

Nevertheless, Patsy and Dugan attacked the turf at once, getting down on their knees and feverishly grubbing with their hands, while Ida ran to the barn in search of spades.

The two men set to work at different points, and found that the strips of turf could easily be pulled up. The ground beneath was fine and powdery, and they were able to scrape it away to a depth of three or four inches without much trouble.

They did not attempt, at first, to go any deeper than that, partly because they did not believe it necessary, and partly because they were waiting for Ida to bring implements of some sort.

Their first little excavations yielded nothing, and they accordingly changed their positions.

It was Patsy who made the first find.

His grubbing fingers touched wood near the center of the turfed area, and he gave an excited exclamation just as the girl came running back with a couple of spades and a pick.

"There are boards under here!" he cried. "Come here, Johnnie!"

Patsy took the pick, and the others wielded the spades as rapidly as they could. A considerable area of heavy planking was quickly laid bare and found to give forth a hollow sound when stamped upon.

But, at first, no trapdoor was discovered. Presently, however, one corner of such a door was unearthed. The rest was the work of only a few moments.

A heavy padlock fastened the door in place, but Patsy's pick soon pried out the staples which held the hasp.

The door was thrown back and the three leaned over the opening into which the low morning sun sent a shaft of light. It had evidently been designed for a sort of vegetable cellar, for it still contained quantities of potatoes, turnips, and the like.

Ida gave a cry of horror as she caught sight of several bodies stretched side by side in the excavation. Patsy, however, let himself down through the hole without a moment's hesitation, and Johnnie followed him.

Amazement and an intolerable fear gripped the young detective as his eyes ranged swiftly over those rows of motionless bodies. He counted them mechanically.

There were twelve of them—all seemingly dead!

His agonizing hunt was ended almost immediately. With successive sinkings of the heart, he recognized Danny, the chauffeur, Jack Wise, Chick, and—last shock of all!—Nick Carter himself.

"They're all here, Heaven help them—and us!" he called up to Ida, who sprang through the opening, with a heartbroken cry, and joined him.

Their fear soon turned to wondering delight, however. The detective and all of his men were still alive. More than that, none of them was wounded or otherwise seriously injured.

Danny was in the worst shape, for the blow he had received on the head had been a severe one. All of them were conscious, but had been tied so cruelly and gagged so effectively that they could hardly move a muscle.

Before they could be released, the attention of Patsy and Ida was drawn to Johnnie Dugan's strange behavior.

The young Irishman was kneeling beside one of the bodies, which he had partly gathered into his arms, and, although it was dressed in masculine garb, he was babbling endearments over it, mingled with ejaculations of pity and concern.

All through the night he had alternately hoped and feared, as a result of his failure to see or learn anything of his missing wife. Now he had unexpectedly found her, and, better still, found her alive and uninjured, despite the fact that she was bound and gagged as securely as were the detectives.

Ida Jones recognized her joyfully, and she advised Dugan, whose joy had made him forget all else, to stop kissing her, and spend his energy in setting her free. She then ran back to Patsy and assisted him to cut the ropes from Nick and the rest.

Nick's first words, after the gag had been removed from his mouth, were thoroughly characteristic of his habitual thoughtfulness for others, even for his bitterest enemies.

"See to those poor devils right away," he said, motioning with one numbed hand toward the forms which had thus far been neglected. "I'm afraid some of them are dead already, but the others must be rushed to the nearest hospital as soon as possible, and given every attention."

Now came perhaps the greatest surprise of all.

One of the seven proved to be French Jimmy Lebeau himself, and he was dead!

The startling discovery was received very incredulously at first, but it was not long before Nick was able to make a scientific test which set all doubts to rest.

The leader of the most notorious of New York's gangs of loft burglars was dead, and had been dead for many hours. In fact, Nick subsequently satisfied himself that French Jimmy had escaped from prison in that, the most effective way of all, before the Bellevue physicians had pronounced him dead.

They had been right—but so had Nick.

In other words, a post-mortem examination revealed the fact that Lebeau had passed away as a result of an overdose of one of the drugs which are used to simulate mortal sickness and its fatal termination.

Every circumstance connected with the strange affair tended to confirm that, and to make it clear that Lebeau had indeed plotted to gain his freedom in precisely the way Nick Carter had suspected.

It was also plain that his followers had, during the fight, been in ignorance of his fate. They had doubtless been anxiously awaiting his return to consciousness, and trying to hasten it, before the arrival of the detectives; and it was certain that they had renewed their efforts after Nick's capture.

But they must have finally come to the conclusion that it was hopeless, and decided to abandon his body, along with the other dead and the wounded.

Of the remaining six, two of them were found to be beyond human aid, while four were wounded, two of them severely.

No more appalling proof of the ruthlessness of the gang could have been established than the callous way in which these men had been bound and gagged with the rest and left to die, either of their wounds or of starvation.

Their immediate usefulness was at an end, and Baxter

Tom and the others had not hesitated to consign them to the most horrible of lingering deaths.

Indeed, by reason of their wounds, their fate would have been far more unbearable than that of the detectives and of Mamie and Danny, whose terrible plight they shared.

It had been an almost unbelievably ruthless attempt to dispose, at one sweep, and by wholesale, of all of those who had stood in the gang's way and threatened to delay the flight.

As for Mamie Dugan, her husband and the detectives were soon in possession of her halting and repentant story.

It was as Nick had surmised.

French Jimmy had contrived to send her repeated threats of vengeance against Johnnie if she refused to aid in his escape. She had paid no outward attention to the first ones, and had not dared to consult with Nick, for fear it would be found out and Johnnie would be knocked on the head out of revenge.

Finally, after the threats had continued and grown even more frightful, she had succumbed and consented to do what Lebeau asked.

Nevertheless, although she made it distinctly understood that she would have nothing to do with the criminal leader in any other way, and in spite of the fact that she was yielding solely to shield her young husband, she felt that she was doing wrong and could never face Dugan again.

It was for that reason that she had written the contradictory and incoherent letter which Johnnie had shown to Nick. She had had no intention of returning home, believing that she was forfeiting all right to further happiness. She had not known what she would do after she had performed her enforced and abhorrent task, but had thought seriously of suicide, especially if French Jimmy should be freed and should try to force his attentions upon her or compel her to join the gang.

It was she, of course, who had played the part of Hattie Wiggins, the real Hattie being at the farm meanwhile, and quite incapable of taking a hand in the deception, because of mental deficiency.

Mamie had been under watch all the time, however, and had been forced to return to the farm and await Lebeau's recovery. They had also compelled her to don man's clothes and make up to represent French Jimmy, their idea being that Nick Carter might possibly show some curiosity about the reported death. If so, they planned to palm Mamie off on the detective once more, and thus give the real Lebeau a better chance to escape.

To this end they had kept her under guard in another part of the house, and Baxter Tom had taken that duty upon himself.

That had been the situation when Nick's party arrived. Finding himself cut off temporarily from the others, Murray had first bound the girl to make sure that she did not go over to the detective's side, and had then emptied the gasoline tank of the car.

It was he, too, who had put Danny Maloney out of the running.

After his arrival at the scene of action had turned the tide against the detective and resulted in Nick's capture, it had been decided to leave Mamie to the same fate which had been agreed upon for the others, comrades and enemies alike.

Baxter Tom and the handful of men who were left to him knew that the girl had taken part under extreme pressure, and that their dead chief had insisted upon it that she must be shadowed at every turn to see that she did not betray them. Now that Lebeau was dead, and there was no reason to suppose that Mamie would keep still about the plot, despite her own part in it. Therefore, to keep her from turning State's evidence, she was buried in the vegetable cellar along with the rest, where it was supposed that they would all remain indefinitely, or at least until life was extinct.

It was long before Mamie Dugan got over her feeling of guilt for the part she had been compelled, as she believed, to play in the plot which had ended so strangely and tragically, but Johnnie's heartfelt greeting when he found her, and his subsequent devotion made it clear to her that she had neither forfeited his love nor his respect, and at length she gave herself up to her happy fate.

The four wounded gangsters got well and were duly sent to Sing Sing, together with Baxter Tom Murray, his partners in that night's proceedings, and half a dozen more of the Lebeau gang, all of whom were bagged soon afterward by Nick Carter and his assistants.

Lem Wiggins and his daughter were also rounded up, and the former is now paying the penalty incurred by his participation in the conspiracy.

The validity of his claim of relationship in connection with the dead gang leader was fully established, as well as the law-abiding nature of his residence in Westchester County during the previous year or so.

He was evidently rotten at the core, however, and had lent himself to the scheme with his eyes open.

French Jimmy's ill-starred death plot had ended in complete disaster, and after its ignominious defeat the infamous Forty Thieves ceased to exist as an organization, and the Stuyvesant Social Club became only a memory.

THE END.

You will find a story out of the ordinary in the next issue of this weekly. It is entitled "The Evil Formula; or, Nick Carter's Gas-meter Problem." It is out November 21st. It is No. 115. Order it from your dealer in advance.

ESCAPE FROM A GEYSER.

A Montana paper tells of the wonderful escape of a young man from a geyser, into which he had fallen. His companions, who were watching his movements, shrieked as they saw him fall. They immediately procured a light and lowered it into the crater for as great a distance as they could with the means at their command.

Nothing could be seen; but by dropping pebbles and bits of wood, they discovered that at the depth of about fifty feet the crater was filled with water. They gave him up for lost, and, with sad hearts, left the scene.

They carried the news to the nearest village, but before any measures could be taken to rescue their companion, he appeared among them alive.

He stated that he fell into the water feet foremost, but quickly rose to the surface, and caught hold of a projecting rock, by which he supported himself. The water was warm and buoyant, and soon began to rise rapidly.

As he rose with it, he grasped the rocks that jutted out

from the sides until he was able to crawl out just as the water became very hot, when he fainted on the edge of the crater from sheer exhaustion. Such an experience is said to be without a parallel. So we should think.

The Riddle and the Ring.

By GORDON MACLAREN.

(This interesting story was commenced in No. 118 of NICK CARTER STORIES. Back numbers can always be obtained from your news dealer or the publishers.)

CHAPTER VI.

AS IN A DREAM.

It was not until he had reached Broadway that Lawrence remembered his failure to turn over the latch-key before leaving the miserable lodgings for good. For a moment he hesitated, wondering whether he ought to go back. Then he remembered the extra money he had given the woman, and the small cost of a new key.

"She can get another for a quarter," he murmured. "Besides, I simply couldn't go back there now. I wonder I was able to stand the old harridan as long as I did."

Dismissing the matter from his mind, he turned down Broadway, and a few minutes later entered the big clothing store of Butler & Bloss.

"I wish to look at some fur-lined coats," he said quietly to the gray-haired man who stepped up.

Whatever surprise the latter may have felt at this request from a man wearing no overcoat at all, and a thinnish suit at that, none showed in his face. Besides looking the gentleman, Barry had an undeniable air about him which commanded respect. No doubt he might have stepped in from some near-by building without stopping to put on his overcoat. At any rate, the customer had the appearance of one used to instant consideration, so a salesman was summoned without delay, and Barry was committed to his care.

Lawrence had decided that about five hundred dollars of the expense sum should be reserved for hotel, restaurants, and incidentals. The remainder, therefore, was left to be spent on his wardrobe, for he had determind to carry out the conditions of the strange bargain to the very letter.

For a full hour he was busy in the various departments of Butler & Bloss, and though in that time he ran up a bill of close onto four hundred dollars, his fur-lined coat was his only extravagance. Even that was not expensive, as such things go, but he had been so cold for so many days that he could not resist the handsome garment, with its luxurious lining and wide collar of unplucked otter.

In addition to this he bought another, lighter overcoat, of soft dark cheviot, two sack suits, and a Tuxedo. There were also, of course, several pairs of shoes necessary, shirts of various sorts, collars, neckties, underwear, gloves, and a quantity of various odds and ends, which added materially to the total of the bill. When he had paid it, and ordered the things delivered at the St. Albans before six o'clock, he slipped into the fur coat, drew on a new pair of gloves, and went out into the street.

There he did not hesitate an instant, but made a bee line for the nearest Broadway restaurant. The interest and excitement of spending money after such a long deprivation had kept him from realizing how ravenously hungry he was, but at the first lull the fact smote him with renewed force.

The glamour of that first real meal in weeks will linger long in the memory of Barry Lawrence. He ordered lavishly, luxuriously, and yet with the instinctive good taste which had characterized him in the days when that sort of thing was a part of his regular life. And, as the courses followed one another, he ate slowly, enjoying every mouthful, reveling in the hum and buzz of conversation, the animated faces of the people about him, and the plaintive murmur of violins playing the latest popular airs.

It was during the progress of the meal that he suddenly solved the problem of the evening clothes which had been troubling him. A dress suit had always seemed to him the one thing it was impossible to get ready-made, and for that reason he had refrained from looking at them in the shop. A sudden remembrance came to him of the suit which Tyson, his tailor, up on Thirty-eighth Street, had been making for him when the crash came. He had never shown up for the final fitting, and it was just possible that the man had held the garments, awaiting some word from him.

Having paid his bill and left the restaurant, Barry walked through to Fifth Avenue and turned up that thoroughfare toward the tailor's rooms. One might have supposed he would have taken a stage or taxi, but no such thing entered his head. Walking, when one is well fed and well clothed, is a very different thing from the exhausting struggle of that morning, when the cold seemed to freeze his very marrow.

He reveled in the warm comfort of his fur-lined coat and heavy deerskin gloves. The passing crowd pleased him, and the very contents of the shop windows interested him as they had never done when he had been penniless. There were few things among the myriads displayed in such tempting array which he could not step in and buy if he chose. The fact that he did not choose made no difference whatever.

Past the brick façade of the Waldorf he walked briskly, glancing in at the dining-room windows with a smile. He would dine there later. It was a pleasant thought.

The tailor welcomed him heartily, gave the suit of evening clothes a final fitting, and promised to have it completed and delivered at the St. Albans by evening.

Presently Lawrence crossed the avenue, and purchased a handsome stick. A little farther on he remembered the need of cuff links and studs. A firm of famed goldsmiths was near at hand, and without hesitation Barry entered.

As the tray of cuff links was lifted out and set on the glass case, Lawrence naturally stripped off his gloves to examine the articles more closely. He gave no thought to the fact that the serpent ring was still on his finger, where he had placed it for safe-keeping, but he was speedily reminded of its presence there by the behavior of the salesman.

The man could scarcely keep his eyes off it. He stared and stared, fidgeted about, and stared again. Finally, unable to contain himself longer, he spoke.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, in a quick, nervous manner, "but you have a wonderful ring there."

Lawrence did not lift his eyes from the tray.

"I think it rather good myself," he admitted.

His tone was intended to quell this unwelcome display of interest, but it quite failed of its effect.

"I have never seen anything like it before," the salesman went on rapidly. "Would you mind if I—looked at it more closely?"

Barry glanced up with a faint frown, alert for the hidden meaning in the man's words. What he saw reassured him. The wide brow, the vibrant, tapering fingers—above all, the soft brown eyes, shining with enthusiastic interest—all pointed toward an expert in his line, to whom a thing of beauty was a source of joy, no matter where he found it.

Without a word, Lawrence extended his hand, and the salesman bent over it, his eyes devouring the ring.

"Extraordinary!" he murmured, half to himself. "The stone is perfect, and worth a small fortune, but the workmanship is even more unusual." He sighed a little, and went on, in a rapt tone: "Eastern, of course. Probably Indian, but not the stuff they make there now. I should place it in the reign of Shah Jahan, the golden age of Delhi—over three hundred years ago. But of course you know all this. I must beg your pardon for letting my interest get the better of me."

"You needn't," Barry returned. "I am very glad to know what you have told me. The former owner of the ring gave me little or no information of its history."

Having concluded his purchases, to which he added a silver cigarette case, he continued his walk up the avenue in a rather thoughtful mood.

So the ring had come from India! Still, that proved nothing. He could not picture the little man in black having anything to do with that country, and it did not really follow that he had. No doubt the emerald had passed through numberless hands since leaving the loving fingers of its creator.

It was foolish to waste time puzzling over a problem the solution of which was beyond his reach. Besides, Lawrence had a curious feeling of irresponsibility, a conviction that he was in the hands of fate. What was to be, would be. There was nothing left for him to do but float with the current. Since that current promised at the moment to take him into pleasant places, he made no effort to struggle out of it, or swim away.

CHAPTER VII.

NEW GRACE AND DIGNITY.

It was half past six, and Lawrence stood in the bedroom of his attractive suite, taking a last critical look at his reflection in the long mirror.

Mrs. Kerr would scarcely have recognized in that tall, distinguished figure in evening dress her former lodger. Somehow, it was not the clothes alone which made the difference, though they had, of course, much to do with it. Few men there are who do not feel the influence of well-cut, perfectly fitting evening clothes.

With Barry, however, the transformation was something deeper and far more encompassing. His face seemed actually fuller, and it glowed with color. His eyes sparkled with excitement. He carried himself with a new grace and dignity. His whole expression was that of a man in love with life, and determined to extract from it the last drop of enjoyment.

Naturally he was quite unconscious of all this as he stared into the glass. He was occupied in noting the fit of the coat about his broad shoulders, and the effect of the barber's shears upon his wavy blond crop. Both seemed satisfactory.

"Tyson never did a better piece of work in his life," he said, aloud, with satisfaction.

Turning from the glass, he reached for his fur-lined coat, and slipped it on. The room was cluttered with parcels and boxes, opened and unopened. Clothes were strewn over bed and chairs. It was too late now to put them away. He could do that later.

Taking up the pigskin wallet from the dressing table, he extracted a hundred dollars, and slipped the bills into an inner pocket. Downstairs he handed the wallet to the clerk, asking him to put it into the safe, and sallied forth to where a taxi waited by the curb.

The corridors of the Waldorf were agleam with lights, and resounded with a buzz of talk, the swish of skirts, and gay laughter of pretty women, not a few of whom turned for a second glance at Lawrence as he made his way slowly to the dining room.

Here the head waiter met him, and ushered him deferentially to the table which had been reserved by telephone. Another man, deft and silent-footed, took his order.

Barry leaned back with a barely perceptible sigh of pleasure. It was good to be back in his own world again; good to watch the many faces with their swiftly varying expressions, to hear the chance remarks that filtered to his ears through the soft music from the orchestra.

Resolutely he thrust all thought of the future from his mind. There were to be six more nights like this, and when the last one had passed it would be quite time to turn to serious things.

The oysters had passed, and the soup. Barry was just finishing his entrée when, happening to glance around at a table standing somewhat back of him and on his right, he experienced a shock.

Two men were dining there alone. The one who faced him, and whose expression was almost ludicrous in its mixture of startled surprise and outraged anger, was short and stout and rather pompous. He was Robert Tappin, president of the Beekman Trust Company. His companion, black-haired and ruddy-cheeked, with full lips, and the blue tinge of a heavy beard showing his cleanshaven face, was Julian Farr, the cashier.

Lawrence disliked them both with the intensity which only a man can feel for those who have wronged him deeply. A little over four months before he had been one of the tellers in that institution. A defalcation was discovered. Several thousand dollars was missing from the cash, and Barry was accused of theft. There was no real proof against him, but the money had been in his charge; and, though Lawrence vehemently protested his innocence, he was summarily discharged.

Not only that, but for weeks he had been followed by detectives set on by Tappin for the purpose apparently of finding out what he had done with the loot. Day and night they dogged his footsteps. Half a dozen times Barry had landed a position, only to lose it the next day, certain that these men had gone to his new employers with their lying tale.

Now these two who had nearly wrecked his life must turn up here to spoil his new-found pleasure. With sud-

den fierce determination, Lawrence resolved that they should not. Pulling himself together, he met Tappin's amazed look with a cool stare of utter blankness which staggered the man. Then he turned back and went on composedly with his dinner.

It was impossible to forget them, however. Though he did not turn again, he felt that their eyes were fixed upon him, and he knew as surely as if he had heard the whispered words that they were talking about him.

Nevertheless, he finished his meal leisurely. When the check had been paid, he arose and made his way slowly toward the door, without a backward glance.

His preoccupation prevented his noticing a rather odd incident which happened on his way out. Near the door, sitting alone at a small table, was a short, thick-set man of forty odd, with a rather full, round face, helped out to some degree by a pointed Vandyke beard, tinged with gray.

During the progress of the meal he had been not a little interested in Lawrence, if one could judge by the frequent keen glances he shot across the room. But now, as Barry came toward him, he swiftly dropped his head seemingly absorbed in the menu which lay before him. Not until the younger man had disappeared did he raise his eyes, and then a close observer might have noticed in them a curious, enigmatic expression.

Within three minutes the table by the door was empty.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GATES OF CHANCE.

At the Fifth Avenue corner Lawrence paused, leaning on his stick, and glancing up and down the brilliant thoroughfare. Though it was too late for the theater, the night was still young, and he was wondering just how he would put in the hours before bedtime.

In the old days, before his disgrace, he would have headed straight for the Harvard Club, on Forty-fourth Street, and been sure of a pleasant, lazy evening; but now the thought did not appeal to him. In some ways Barry was unusually sensitive, and it had happened that the few acquaintances he encountered shortly after leaving the bank seemed cool and offish in their manner.

Whether that was really so, and chance had thrown the caddishly inclined in his way, or whether he had simply imagined it all, did not matter now. The result had been to embitter the young man, and make him determined to take no further chances of snubbing from those he had supposed his friends.

The club was, therefore, impossible. It was equally out of the question to look up any one else he had known in his prosperous days. As for relatives—well, Barry was singularly deficient in that respect. Save some cousins in Boston, and an aunt living in Providence, he was quite alone in the world.

In spite of this, the pause at the corner was not a long one. Lawrence wanted to walk. The fascination of the great city still held him in a vise. The novelty of seeing it in this wonderful new light had not even begun to wear off. He wanted to watch the people, look into the shop windows, smoke his cigar, secure in the knowledge that he was safe against cold and hunger and distress.

Wondering which way to turn, Barry's eyes fell upon an approaching Thirty-fourth Street car, and whimsically he determined to take the opposite direction to that of the first alighting passenger. With a faint smile curving his sensitive mouth, and lurking in the pleasant gray eyes, he saw a man bustle off the front platform, dart across the tracks, and hurry on up the avenue. Then, without hesitation, Lawrence wheeled about, and walked briskly downtown.

There was a certain fascination in walking thus at random, having no fixed plan, no definite destination. He had done exactly the same thing in the weary weeks which now seemed so dim and nebulous and far away; but this was quite different. He was well fed and immaculately garbed. There was money in his pockets, and a fine cigar between his teeth. When he tired of rambling he had simply to hail a taxi or step on a car and be whirled back to the luxurious apartment which belonged to him—for a week, at least.

And so it pleased him to feel again that he was in the hands of fate; that the gates of chance had opened to his touch, admitting him to a strange, fantastic city where anything might happen, and nothing was beyond the bounds of probability.

As he walked briskly southward, he amused himself for a time by watching the passers-by, and inventing stories to fit their appearance. But this soon palled. They were all so bundled up, and hurried past so swiftly through the bitter air, that all Barry could think of was how cold they were and how anxious to get home.

Then he took to regulating his course by means of odd devices. If a certain man crossed the avenue, at Twenty-eighth Street, he would follow the example. If the next kept on downtown, Lawrence would turn eastward on Twenty-seventh Street, and the like.

It happened that the man turned into the side street, and Barry continued straight ahead until, high above the icy branches of the naked trees, the glittering Metropolitan Tower, ethereal and fairylike, in spite of its colossal bulk, loomed before his eyes.

He paused an instant, while the silvery chimes rang out the hour of nine. There were many directions in which he might turn his steps, but at the moment the square seemed singularly deserted. At length his glance shifted to the bright, open space beyond him, where three streets joined, and he smiled.

"If that Broadway car is a Lexington," he murmured, "I'll turn across the square."

The car approached, swerved off, and turned east on Twenty-third Street; and Lawrence promptly wheeled into the winding walk, and briskly followed the diagonal course.

The benches, usually so full of loungers, were deserted now. The fountain in the center was filled with dingy snow, while ice glittered on the iron railing about it. The wind, whistling across the open space, penetrated even the thick fur of Barry's coat a little, and made him half wish that guiding street car had not led him thither. He did not turn back, however; he was too much interested in this game of chance to give it up just because it had so far failed to bring him anything out of the ordinary.

Rounding the desolate fountain, he slipped on a treacherous bit of ice. When he recovered his equilibrium, he saw that a woman was coming toward him along the cement path. She walked hurriedly, yet there was an odd touch of indecision in her movements which puzzled Barry.

As they approached each other, she passed under the glare of an electric light, and Lawrence noticed for the first time how slim and girlish she was. She seemed little more than a child. Certainly she ought not to be on the streets at that hour and in such bitter weather.

As she came nearer he saw that she had no muff or neck-piece, and that her little suit seemed woefully inadequate. Her face was invisible under the wide brim of the black hat, but she did not pause or falter or even glance up at him.

Then came a sound which turned Barry's sigh into a quick gasp of pain, and made him whirl around to stare after the slight, retreating figure. It was a stifled sob, carried to his ears by the vagrant wind, until it seemed as clear and pitiful as if she had stood close beside him. Another followed, and another still. The girl was crying as if her heart would break.

CHAPTER IX.

A WOMAN IN DISTRESS.

For a second Lawrence stood rooted to the pavement, His first impulse was to follow her. She was in trouble, and perhaps he could help her. He took a few quick steps back toward the fountain, and stopped still. How could he speak to her? How could he offer to do her a service? She would misconstrue his motives, and be terrified. She would——

A faint cry, which was little more than a startled exclamation of terror, cut short Barry's mental reasonings, and in a second he was running forward with long, lithe strides. As he approached the fountain he saw another figure scurrying away across the snow toward Madison Avenue. The girl was crouching against the ice-covered railing, steadying herself with one small, gloved hand, and, as Lawrence came straight toward her, he saw that she was trembling violently.

"You called me," he said quietly.

For a second she made no response. Her fingers still clutched the iron railing; her whole attitude was that of one driven into a corner and standing at bay. From under the shadowy hat brim Barry could see that her lips were pressed tightly together. Her eyes, wide with a desperate sort of fear, were fixed upon his face.

"I heard you call out," Barry said gently. "I thought you were frightened at something."

Something in his voice, or perhaps his face—the light was very bright around the snowy fountain—reassured her. Her eyes lost a little of that look of terror, and her fingers relaxed their grip on the iron railing.

"I was," she answered, in a low, uneven, and charming voice, "terribly frightened. That—man——"

Suddenly she put up both hands to her face, and swiftly turned from him. Scarcely a sound came from her, but the sight of that bowed head and the convulsively heaving shoulders, showing but too plainly through the thin cloth of her short coat, hurt Lawrence desperately, and brought a lump into his throat. She seemed so young and frail and girlish, so utterly unfitted to cope with the world, that a quick impulse came to the man to take her in his arms and comfort her exactly as one does a child. He realized instantly, of course, that such a thing would be impossible.

"Please don't," he said softly, after a moment's silence. "It's all right now." He watchel her trembling hands searching for a handkerchief, and then he went on, with deliberately forced cheerfulness: "I tell you what we'll do. If you'll let me, I'll walk along with you, so there won't be a chance of anything like this happening again."

She ceased dabbing her eyes and, turning slowly, looked long and searchingly into his face.

"You are very kind," she said at length, and Barry caught again that faint, Southern intonation which he had not been quite sure of before; "but it is a long distance, and I think I can manage by myself. I—am used to going about alone."

"But you really wouldn't be taking me out of my way—if that's what you were thinking," Lawrence expostulated. "I haven't a thing to do. I'm out for a walk, and one direction is just as good as another for me. I hate to think of your taking any more chances."

For a second the girl hesitated. Then her lids drooped a little, and she swayed the least bit, putting out one hand blindly to steady herself against the railing.

Barry stepped swiftly forward, and took her arm.

"Come!" he said, with a whimsical sort of positiveness. "You really must! I know it's unconventional, and all that, but we'll probably never see each other after to-night. I'll leave you wherever you wish, and say good night. You were heading toward Broadway, weren't you? Well, we'll go together."

The girl made no protest. Perhaps it was because she had come to the end of her rope, and had no strength left. Perhaps she sensed intuitively the motives which governed this frank, straightforward stranger who had come to her aid so opportunely. At all events, she let her hand rest upon his arm, and walked with him back through the square, across Twenty-fifth Street into the dazzling stretch of Broadway.

The touch of her hand brought again to Barry that odd desire to protect and comfort her. By this time he knew that she was almost perishing with cold. In spite of her effort to control herself, he felt she was shaking violently, and every now and then the unconscious weight of her hand on his arm made him wonder whether some other thing than cold had not contributed to her weakness.

He wanted desperately to do something, yet somehow he could not think of any way. He had not asked her where she wished to go, and the girl herself volunteered nothing.

And so they walked on up New York's great artery, he talking carelessly, lightly, and frequently at random as his brain worked in another totally different direction, she answering him briefly now and then in her soft, tired voice, but more often silent—out of sheer weariness, he guessed.

Suddenly the electric sign of a well-known restaurant blazing before his eyes gave Lawrence the clew he had been seeking, and he stopped abruptly.

"Are you in very much of a hurry?" he asked.

She glanced up at him swiftly, and he was struck anew by the charm of her wonderful eyes, the delicate beauty of her mouth and chin.

"Not very," she said, in an odd, restrained tone. "Why?"

"I was wondering whether you'd do me a favor," Barry returned glibly. "I meant to get a bite of supper here, and I hate to eat alone. If you'd only take pity on me, and keep me company, I'd be everlastingly obliged.

After that we can take a car to where you're going, so's to make up time."

Again she sent a long, searching glance into his candid, level gray eyes. Then suddenly she laughed, a curious laugh, which had no mirth in it, but rather held an undercurrent of intense pathos.

"Very well," she said quietly, with an odd gesture of her hands.

Her manner brought the color into Barry's cheeks, and made him wonder whether she saw through his clumsy subterfuge. He did not hesitate, however, but stood aside for her to enter the turnstile door, following close behind.

The dining room was almost empty, for it was the quiet interval which comes between dinner and the after-theater supper crowd. They were ushered at once to a table against the wall.

While Barry was slipping out of his coat he noticed the girl glancing into a mirror beside her, touching her hair here and there, and giving the frilly lace thing at her neck an unconscious pat. She was still shaking a little, and when she drew off her gloves he saw that she was gently chafing her hands together beneath the shelter of the white cloth.

Her hair was brown, thick, and dark, with glints of copper in it, and waved attractively above her brow. Her eyes were almost of the same shade, with long, curling lashes, which made them seem almost too large for the delicate, oval face. Her mouth was sensitive, and infinitely appealing with its pathetic downward droop at the corners. There was an unmistakable refinement in everything about her; and, in spite of the fact that she was very tiny, she held herself with an air which made Barry quite forget her forlorn condition.

"How the mischief could I have ever taken her for a child?" he thought, with a faint flush of embarrassment, as he reached for the card. "I suppose it was because she seemed so little and helpless."

CHAPTER X.

SHIRLEY RIVES.

Having ordered two portions of a nourishing bouillon to be served at once, Lawrence picked out several dishes, then leaned back in his chair.

"I quite forgot to introduce myself," he said, with quick, boyish impulsiveness. "My name is Lawrence—Barry Lawrence."

A faint, shadowy smile curved the girl's lips. The warmth of the room was beginning to touch her cheeks with color, and make her even more lovely than before.

"It will be easier," she conceded gravely. "I am Shirley Rives."

"From Virginia?" Barry inquired quickly, then bit his lips. "I beg your pardon," he added contritely. "I forgot for a second that I meant to ask no questions."

"That one doesn't matter," she said quietly. "I *am* from Virginia. Since you've asked it, though, I'll venture one myself: Do you happen, by any chance, to be a Harvard man?"

Barry stared. "Why, yes," he exclaimed. "How in the world did you guess?"

"You seem rather like other Cambridge men I've known," she answered slowly. "I had a cousin there, and his friends used to visit——"

She broke off abruptly, as if regretting that she had been so frank, and for a moment there was silence as she touched one of the forks nervously.

"I don't know that it makes much difference," she went on at length. "His name is Philip Calvert. Perhaps you knew him."

Barry laughed boyishly, and then bent forward with sparkling eyes. "Of course I did!" he exclaimed. "He was a junior the year I was graduated. To think of my meeting Phil Calvert's cousin in New York! I knew chance was going to bring me something pleasant when I started out this evening."

There was a moment's pause while the waiter placed the soup before them. Somehow Barry had a feeling that the girl was more than hungry, and, though he did not see how he could take a mouthful after his luxurious dinner at the Waldorf, he did his best to seem ravenous himself, talking all the while, so that she might not see how little he was really eating.

The girl sipped the bouillon slowly and leisurely, listening to her companion's whimsical account of his progress down Fifth Avenue that night, and occasionally making a light comment of her own. One would never have guessed to watch her that she *could* have drained the cup at a single swallow.

Lawrence's surmise as to her desperate condition was more the result of intuition, helped on a little by details he observed from time to time, rather than anything he saw in her manner.

Little by little it was borne upon his consciousness that the extraordinary trimness which had puzzled him at first was nothing more than the painful neatness of extreme poverty, combined with innate good taste. The wide black hat was simply trimmed, and showed signs of wear. The perfectly fitting suit was of good material, but had been brushed and sponged until it was almost threadbare. The shirt waist of fine cambric looked as if it had been washed time and again with jealous care by the girl's own hands. On one sleeve a tear had been repaired with painful neatness.

All this Barry noticed as he talked on, wondering to himself how under the sun a cousin of his fastidious, seemingly wealthy college mate could possibly have been reduced to such straits. But he asked no questions, nor did he in his manner betray the slightest touch of curiosity. He was only too thankful to see, under the influence of warmth and comfort and nourishing food, the color coming back into the girl's face, the sparkle to her eyes, and that tired droop of her mouth growing less and less noticeable.

As the meal progressed, however, his curiosity was gratified. It was inevitable that the discovery of a mutual friend should make some difference in the girl's attitude toward Lawrence. From discussing Calvert—who, it appeared, had been in Manila for over a year—the girl's story came out bit by bit.

More than likely Shirley Rives would never have thought of starting out to tell it to any one from beginning to end. But, while he did not express it by a single word, she seemed to feel Barry's sympathy, and be comforted by it. She had been bearing her troubles alone for so long that the temptation to talk a little about them to some one else was irresistible. And, last of all, she, too, seemed to feel that night something of Barry's attitude toward fate. She had come to the end of her rope, and

was desperate. When one is in that pass conventions seem very petty, and life is stripped to the bones.

The story Lawrence gathered from a chance word here, a sentence there, was very old and hackneyed. It was really threadbare, yet the personality of the girl across the table lent it a vivid, enthralling interest.

Orphaned a year before, and left in straitened circumstances, Shirley Rives had taken the few hundred dollars remaining after the settlement of the encumbered estate, and come to New York to earn her living. Having no particular talent, and no influence, stenography seemed the only thing left her. She took a course in a correspondence school, and then obtained a position. Three months later the firm changed its organization, and she was cast adrift. She got another place, after eating into her diminishing capital, but the wholesale company was presently absorbed by a trust. Another period of enforced idleness ensued before she was taken on in a broker's office, only to be forced to leave by the unwelcome attentions of a junior partner.

That was three weeks ago. Since then she had failed to find anything. Her money became exhausted, and the board bill remained unpaid. The landlady gave her notice to pay or leave. The room had been rented late in the afternoon to another woman. Since then she had walked the streets, dazed, bewildered, not knowing what to do or where to go.

It was all told in snatches, but the thought of this girl, delicate and refined and well-bred, thrust out into the streets at such a time, without a penny, and with no place to go, made Barry's blood boil. Again came that intense desire to do something for her, accompanied by that same maddening sense of helplessness he had felt before.

"You were hurrying when I saw you first," he said at length.

She moved her shoulders a little. "It was partly to keep warm," she explained quietly, "and partly because I had just thought of a sort of forlorn hope."

"And that was——"

"A girl who used to work with me in the wholesale house; she was very nice, and we got to be good friends. She used to live on Forty-eighth Street, and I thought she would take me in to-night."

"How long is it since you've seen her?" Barry asked.

"Some months. I was tired, and it's a long way to Forty-eighth Street."

She tried to speak lightly, but Lawrence could see that old look of desperation, banished for a time, again lurking in her eyes.

"But what if she's moved?" he asked. "What if you shouldn't find her at the old address?"

She tried to smile, but her lips only quivered. And though she held her head high, like the thoroughbred she was, the expression in her eyes cut Barry to the quick.

"I—hadn't thought," she answered, in a low tone.

CHAPTER XI.

HIDE AND SEEK.

For a second Lawrence was silent, as a thought flashed through his brain as to the pathetic plight of the girl. The next instant he bent forward across the table, his clear gray eyes fixed upon hers, and holding her wavering gaze.

"I want to tell you a little story, Miss Rives," he said, in a hurried, almost jerky, tone, "and then I want you to do me a favor. Wait, please! Don't say you won't until you've heard me. This morning I left a miserable hall bedroom over on the West Side to walk the streets, because I could not face the woman I owed three weeks' rent."

She caught her breath quickly, and, as her eyes flashed to the wonderful emerald ring on his finger and back again to the pearls gleaming in his immaculate shirt, an expression of bewildered incredulity came into her face.

"I know," Barry went on hastily; "it seems impossible, but it's true. I'd had little to eat for days. My last nickel went for a cup of coffee. I had only a single penny left. I was cold and hungry and desperate. I had been out of a job for months, and there wasn't the slightest prospect of getting one. You see, there's scarcely a person in New York who could understand as I do what you have been through—and what may be before you now."

He paused an instant, but she made no comment. Her eyes were fixed intently on him as if his story held her entranced.

"For hours I walked the streets, then took refuge in a railway station to keep from freezing," Lawrence continued presently. "And there, when everything was blackest, when it seemed as if not a single hope remained, the wheel of fortune turned. From the lowest depths I was hoisted in a moment to a height I had come to believe impossible."

A faint, puzzled line had come into her low forehead. For a moment she waited, expecting him to continue. When he did not, she raised her eyebrows a trifle.

"But how——" she began.

"I can't tell you," he put in swiftly. "I've promised to keep silent. I can only say that I was given a very large sum of money to carry out certain conditions, and that those conditions carry with them no loss of self-respect. What I want you to do is to take a little—just a little—of this money to tide you over this period of hard luck."

A sudden color flamed into her face, and her lips parted. Before she could utter a word Barry went on pleadingly:

"Please don't say no, Miss Rives. The situation is desperate. If this girl friend of yours has moved, what will you do? Even if she is still there, I don't suppose you would keep on accepting hospitality from one who probably couldn't afford it. I can, you see, and if you'll only look upon me as Phil's friend, acting in his place, I'm sure you won't refuse."

For a long minute the girl sat staring into his frank, kindly face with eyes which seemed to plumb his very soul. Perhaps it was what she saw there that made her give in; perhaps it was the thoughts which flashed through her mind of the awful streets, wind-swept and dark and bitter cold, with even more poignant terrors lurking in the shadows. At all events, she sighed faintly, and reached for her gloves.

"Very well, Mr. Lawrence," she said quietly. "You may lend me—ten dollars."

"But that isn't——"

"It is quite enough," she put in decidedly, "to make me grateful to you as long as I live. Would you mind—if we go now? It's getting late."

Without further protest, Barry paid the bill at once, and helped her on with her coat. As they reached the street he handed her a ten-dollar bill, which she slipped into her worn glove with another brief word of thanks.

The ride uptown was a rather silent one. Barry did most of the talking, for he felt that the girl would rather say little.

At Forty-eighth Street they got out, and, turning westward, walked briskly through the chilly street. As they approached a certain shabby-looking house midway in a block, Miss Rives, glancing upward, gave an exclamation of satisfaction at the sight of a light in the front room on the top floor.

"I'm sure Sally's still there," she said, turning to Lawrence. "She used to sit up reading till all hours." She hesitated an instant, and then went on, more slowly: "I think I'd better go to the door alone. The woman who keeps the house is very kind, and, even if Sally's gone, she'll take me in. Good-by, Mr. Lawrence, and—thank you—a thousand times, for what you have done. Will you—give me your address so that I can send back the money—when I have it?"

Barry's fingers closed firmly over the hand she held out.

"I'm at the St. Albans just now," he returned. "But I probably won't stay there long. Wouldn't it be better if I looked you up to see how you're getting on?"

For a bare second Shirley Rives hesitated. Then she turned away, and began mounting the steps.

"I should be very glad to see you again, Mr. Lawrence," she answered. "Good night."

From a little distance Barry watched her ring the bell, saw the door open with almost no delay at all, and heard a brief murmur of conversation. When the girl finally stepped into the house and the door closed, he turned away with a sigh of satisfaction, and started back toward Broadway.

He had not gone more than a few steps when he saw approaching the lights of a rapidly moving carriage, and a moment later a well-appointed private brougham passed him, the iron-shod hoofs of the spirited horses striking sparks from the icy street. A vague, languid curiosity stirred him as to what a conveyance of that sort was doing there at that hour, but it swiftly vanished in the interest of another discovery.

Reaching the corner of Eighth Avenue, he happened to glance swiftly to his right, and noticed a man standing silently in the corner of a darkened doorway. There was nothing very extraordinary in this, save for the fact that it was a night which offered no temptations for loitering in the street; but there was something about the powerful, square-shouldered figure, accentuated by the heavy ulster which enveloped it, that struck Lawrence as oddly familiar. The coat collar was turned up and buttoned close; the brim of the soft felt hat was pulled well down, so as to conceal the face, but in spite of that a bit of grizzled beard was visible, which stimulated Barry's memory.

In that momentary hesitation on the curb he remembered that just such a man had been standing in another doorway near the restaurant as they left it less than an hour before, and he wondered at the curious coincidence which should bring about this second meeting.

Before he reached Broadway Lawrence began to have doubts as to whether it really was a coincidence or not. Another man would have thought nothing of the matter; but Barry had lately been through an experience of shadowing which taught him many things about the methods of private detectives and others of their ilk, which had produced in him a habit of being constantly on guard.

At least it would do no harm to be sure, he thought, and, rounding the corner of Broadway, he hastened forward a few steps to the entrance of a moving-picture theater. Once within its shelter, he swiftly found a spot where the plate-glass windows of the ticket booth acted as an admirable reflector. Then, back squarely to the street, and eyes riveted on the improvised mirror, he leisurely undid his fur coat, as leisurely produced a cigarette from his case, and hunted for his match box.

It was just as he struck a light that his patience was rewarded. In the glass he saw the stranger steal silently into view around the corner, hesitate for the fraction of a second, then, catching sight of Barry's back, as softly withdraw out of sight.

"So that's your little game, is it?" Lawrence reflected, with a grim smile, as he lighted the cigarette with care, and flicked the match into the street. "Looks as if there might be a bit of fun in this."

Buttoning his coat, he started briskly down Longacre Square, swinging his stick with the air of a man who was just beginning a constitutional. In front of the Astor he paused a second, as if half minded to enter the brilliant hostelry. Then, without warning, he turned abruptly, stepped into the street, and headed for the Times Building. As he did so he caught a glimpse, out of the corner of his eye, of his pursuer, half a block in the rear.

With a chuckle of amusement, Barry passed the outdoor subway entrance, and walked swiftly into the lower floor of the building. The instant he was inside, he hastened his steps, hurried past the stairs leading down into the underground road, pushed his way through the throng which crowded the big drug store that occupies the ground floor, and emerged on Forty-second Street.

A crosstown car was just getting up speed as he dashed across the street, and with some difficulty he raced forward and swung himself aboard. A backward glance showed that his bearded friend was nowhere in sight, and Lawrence smiled again.

Nevertheless, he did not relax his vigilance. Making his way through to the front of the car, he sat down on one of the little seats just behind the motorman, and made no attempt to alight until Madison Avenue had been reached. Here he slipped off, dodged around the front of the car, slid across the slippery pavement, and was engulfed in the comparative shadow of the Manhattan in an instant.

The three blocks to Forty-fifth were passed in as many minutes. Around the corner of the cross street, however, he sought a secluded doorway, and waited patiently for as much as five minutes, with the pleasant, ever-growing conviction that his man had been eluded.

"Not quite clever enough, my friend," he murmured, as he crossed the dark and rather silent street, heading for the bright entrance of the St. Albans near Fifth Avenue.

Part way down the block stood a pair of old-fashioned brownstone houses, and, as he passed the shadowy bulk of the first high stoop, Barry chuckled again.

"Not quite clever enough," he repeated amusedly. "You'll have to get up a trifle early——"

Crash! From behind, something struck his head with a crushing force that sent him to his knees, stick flying one way, top hat the other.

With a hoarse cry of anger, he strove dazedly to turn and grapple with the unknown assailant. Before he could do so the heavy weapon descended for the second time. There was a shower of stars, a sickening sense of faintness, and, with a groan, Lawrence toppled forward on his face, to lie still and silent on the icy pavement.

CHAPTER XII.

PUZZLED.

How long Barry Lawrence lay there unconscious he did not know. Afterward he realized that it could have been no more than a minute or two, but at the moment he was too occupied with what was occurring near him to waste time on that score.

Even before he opened his eyes he was vaguely aware that a struggle was going on close at hand. The thud of feet, the heavy breathing, mingled with occasional oaths, subdued, but fervent, told him that, and acted as a spur on his dazed senses.

A moment later, as he pulled himself to a crouching position on the pavement, he discerned through the darkness two figures swaying in close embrace a dozen feet away.

What did it mean? Who were they? He could not understand why they were fighting there, instead of carrying out the object of their attack on him. Then, as his sight cleared, he suddenly discovered that one of them was the bulky man in the soft hat whom he had lately been pluming himself on having given the slip so completely. The other was taller and wore no overcoat; beyond that Lawrence could make out no distinguishing features.

Suddenly, out of the bewildering chaos of Barry's mind, came the swift realization that one of these men was apparently on his side. There could be no question that one was fighting in his behalf to prevent the other from carrying out the object of the cowardly attack, whatever that might be.

Of reason or motive for that attack, Barry knew none, but he was strongly moved for a moment to join in the mix-up, and get in a blow or two he was aching to deliver. He even secured his hat and stick, and was on the point of struggling to his feet, when he remembered that he had no idea which was the friend and which the enemy. He was not even sure that either of them was a friend.

What could he do?

The answer came on the very heels of the unspoken question. The gate in the low, old-fashioned iron fence close beside him was partly open. Beyond loomed the friendly shadow of the high stoop.

Instinctively, with his brain still a little muddled from the blow he had received, Barry crept silently through the gate, casting a swift, sidelong glance at the struggling pair. He saw that the taller man was evidently getting the worst of it, and apparently trying his best to break away. In another moment the fellow with the beard would be free—free to return and complete his work; for by this time Lawrence had come to the conclusion that he was the one responsible for the assault.

Without a second's delay the Harvard man slipped through the gate and closed it softly behind him. Rising to his feet, but stooping low, he felt his way forward, went down a couple of steps, and pushed against the iron grille which gave access to a space under the stoop, and thence to the basement door.

To his surprise, it yielded to his touch, and a moment later he was ensconced in the little square, dark space, the grille closed and latched, peering through the openings in the ornate wrought ironwork.

He was no more than safe before he heard the beat of running feet on the pavement, and saw a tall, thin figure dart past his hiding place, and disappear toward Madison Avenue. An instant later another, bulkier shadow appeared more slowly, and paused by the low fence.

It was the mysterious person with the beard, and Barry shrank swiftly back, wondering what he meant to do.

There was a moment's pause; then the low gate was pushed open, and the stranger stepped toward the grille. Reaching it, he shook it briskly, but the latch held. From where he had retreated in the shadow, with one arm thrown up to prevent his face from being seen, Barry heard the unknown give a guttural growl of mingled surprise and impatience. A brief pause followed, during which his irregular breathing sounded clear and distinct. Then he turned and walked back to the sidewalk, the gate clicking behind him.

For a minute or two Barry did not move, but at length, unable to restrain his curiosity, he stole to the grille and peered through. The stranger was still standing near the fence, gazing intently up and down the street. Presently he disappeared toward Madison Avenue, and Barry, after waiting a few moments, undid the grille and stole out.

Peering over the fence, the Harvard man watched the mysterious stranger move slowly down the street, staring keenly into every doorway as he passed it. Finally, at the corner, he paused, glanced swiftly back, stood for some time undecided, then vanished from sight.

The instant the man was gone, Barry emerged, and made his way straight back to the hotel. He managed to brush his top hat into some semblance of decency, and rid his coat of the bits of ice and snow which clung to it. Happily the elevator boy was half asleep, and did not notice anything unusual in his appearance, so that Lawrence reached his rooms without attracting undue comment.

His first move was to examine the lump on his head, which felt about the size of a billiard ball. He had a feeling that his hair must be smeared and clotted with blood, and was agreeably surprised to find that the skin had scarcely been broken. The weapon, whatever it was, had evidently struck just the right spot to produce momentary unconsciousness, without doing any very permanent damage.

Stripping off his clothes, and getting into pajamas and a loose dressing gown, Barry bathed the bump carefully with warm water, then with cold, placed a wet towel against it, and sat down to think over the night's experiences.

They had certainly not lacked interest and excitement.

When he started out in that whimsical manner from the Waldorf he had expected nothing quite like this.

The last adventure naturally received his attention first. Who was the bearded man, and why had he such an interest in Lawrence? Remembering the distasteful encounter with Tappin at the Waldorf, Barry wondered whether it were possible that the bank president had set his detectives again on the trail.

Swiftly he thrust the idea aside. Though he realized that the sudden display of affluence on the part of one who had so short a time ago been in abject poverty, was sufficient reason for Tappin to make another effort to find out what had become of the missing funds, Lawrence did not see how there could possibly have been time to get into communication with the agency, and summon a detective to the hotel.

"I left them at table," he murmured aloud, his forehead wrinkled in a puzzled manner. "No one could know where I was going—I didn't even know myself; yet that fellow was waiting outside the Broadway restaurant."

With Tappin eliminated, what motive remained? Was the bearded man a common thief who had marked him down as a profitable undertaking? Had he by any chance caught a glimpse of the serpent ring? Barry had not been oblivious to the fact that the unique jewel had attracted attention in many quarters that evening; and now, as he lifted his hand, and surveyed the great, square, dully gleaming stone, with its strange setting, he wondered suddenly whether there was anything uncanny about the thing. He had read before of jewels like this coming out of the mysterious East, and leaving a trail of violence in their wake. Perhaps there was something about it——

"Pshaw!" he exclaimed aloud, springing to his feet. "I'm getting dippy! This is New York City, and the twentieth century. Such things can't happen here. I'm going to bed."

But after the lights were out, and he had stretched himself luxuriously between the fine sheets, the puzzle returned to torment him. How long it might have kept him restlessly awake he did not know. Fortunately his mind suddenly jumped to the more restful and infinitely more attractive subject of Shirley Rives.

She affected him in a way no girl had ever done before. There was an impalpable charm about her which he could not define, but which was very powerful; a curve to her lips that fascinated him even to think of now.

If he only had a little influence in the proper quarters it might be possible to find her a position. But, no! That wouldn't do at all. He realized suddenly that hateful gossip and slander had started from slighter beginnings than that.

Still, something must be done. It was intolerable to think of her being placed again in the horrible position from which he had rescued her that evening. Something should be done. He must think up a scheme. Probably one would come to him in the morning, when he was fresh, and not so utterly fagged out as he was this minute.

So he dropped asleep, the last thing before his eyes a vivid mental picture of the girl's face as he had last seen it, turned back to glance at him over her shoulder; the last thought in his mind a little pæan of thanksgiving to the god of chance who had directed his footsteps that evening to such wonderful and wholly unexpected purpose.

TO BE CONTINUED.

TRACKING SNAKES BY SCENT.

When the Australian aborigine or black fellow is pushed and can find no other game, he catches lizards, snakes, iguanas, and kangaroo rats, the wiliest and most agile of all wild animals on their own ground, and amid surroundings favorable to their concealment, by simply exercising the faculties of a superior wild animal.

With those wonderful brown eyes of his, he can see the faintest trail where a snake had zigzagged through the dry moss and leaves, or the slightest footmark where an iguana had fled from his approach to its refuge in a hollow tree. When daylight fails him, and the dews of evening begin to fall, his broad nostrils take up the chase, and stooping down among the bushes, with a tough forked stick in his hands to support him in his tiring attitude, he follows the track as unerringly as any bloodhound.

When he runs a snake to earth, if he cannot surprise it in the open and kill it by a sudden blow of his stick, he squats over its hole, holding the forked end of his stick downward, and makes a low hissing or whistling sound with his lips.

Soon the snake puts his head out of the hole and peers round. In an instant the forked stick descends and fixes it to the ground by the neck, and the black fellow, seizing it firmly with his muscular hands just behind the head, so that it cannot bite him, drags it out of the hole, and twists its head off; or, if it is too strong for that, pounds it on the ground till its back is broken.

So with the iguanas and all the other animals. The black fellow never loses their trail when once he gets upon it, and, having followed them to their lair, he patiently awaits until they come out, or until he is able to get a hand in and pull them out.

The black fellows declare, and probaby with truth, that not a single animal can escape them, if they have time to hunt a piece of desert country thoroughly. When they want to return to camp, they can follow their own trail by sight with the greatest ease, but they say they cannot follow their own trail by scent at all. It has no scent for them, though another man's has strong scent.

This is one of the most curious facts connected with these strange people; but it is only in accord with well-known natural phenomena.

BOTH WRONG.

Two grammarians were wrangling the other day; one contending that it was only proper to say, "My wages is high," while the other noisily insisted that the correct thing was, "My wages are high."

Finally they stopped a day laborer, and submitted the question to him.

"Which do you say: "Your wages is high,' or, 'Your wages are high?'"

"Oh, off wid yer nonsense!" he said, resuming his pick; "yer nayther of yer right; me wages be low, bad luck to it."

THE NEWS OF ALL NATIONS.

Samaritan Loses His Life.

An English soldier, wounded in the battle near Mons, gave this description of what he saw:

"One of our men who was holding his water bottle to a wounded German was shot dead. Another stopped under fire to light a cigarette, when a bullet struck him on the fingers, and one hand will have to come off."

Human Interest in Story of Forgery.

A human-interest story of heart-touching qualities came to light at Kinston, N. C., when James Freeland was arrested for alleged forgery recently, the charge being that he had forged the name of a woman, now deceased, to a check for fifty dollars, and had the same cashed at the bank where the woman carried an account.

It developed that the woman was a sister-in-law of the defendant. She died three weeks before, and the young man, being in straitened circumstances, was unable to provide for a suitable burial of his dead wife's sister. However, he had knowledge that she carried an account for savings at the bank, so he forged her name to a check and succeeded in obtaining fifty dollars thereby, which was used to defray expenses of the funeral.

"Every Shot a Hit," He Tells Kaiser.

Describing the recent visit of Kaiser William with Prince Oscar, near Longwy, a Rotterdam, Holland, correspondent says the Kaiser inspected the machine guns there and then said to a gunner: "You have fired many rounds. How many hit?"

"About one hundred per cent," the gunner replied.

Six Snakes on His Pitchfork.

Half a dozen black snakes transfixed with a four-pronged pitchfork left Hosea Long, of Orange Township, Indiana, in a class by himself among local snake killers.

He sighted the writhing snakes when turning windrows in an alfalfa field. Spearing the mass, he was put to flight by a bull snake which started to climb the pitchfork handle. He returned with another fork, and killed it and others which, like it, had been pierced by the prongs.

The largest snake was five feet three inches long. The combined length of the six reptiles was twenty-three feet.

Greatest Gold Strike Since Dawson Find.

Al Wolf and A. H. Tutt, well-known prospectors, arrived in Seward, Alaska, from Broad Pass, bringing a story of one of the greatest strikes made in the North since the Dawson find. It consists of immense low-grade ledges or dikes, located in the Broad Pass country.

Wolf and Tutt say they staked claims on ledges for more than two thousand feet in width that have been traced and staked for a distance of eighteen miles.

They report that the Wells brothers, interior mining men, have staked ledges that average one hundred feet in width, and that assay straight across better than $15 per ton, with a fourteen-foot pay streak on the hanging wall which will average better than $250 per ton.

Countless other finds have been made this summer. Pankey brothers, of Virginia City, Mont., made a rich find, and are on a steamer taking seventy samples of ore to Seattle for assay tests.

Mexicans Battle Cowboys.

Mistaking each other for cattle rustlers, Mexican soldiers and American cowboys on the Nelson Morris Ranch, across the border from Sierra Blanca, Texas, opened fire. A battle followed, until both sides discovered the mistake and hoisted white flags. One cowboy, W. A. Holt, was seriously injured.

The Soldier Spirit.

A veteran of the Civil War sang hymns at the Receiving Hospital in Los Angeles, Cal., while physicians sought to save his life after an automobile truck had crushed the brave old soldier's legs. The grit that sings when the fight is on is something America must never lose.

Fighting Gander.

At Grassdale, Va., the Beverly farmstead, is a gander that has the reputation of being the "fightingest" bird in the district. After having chased at sundry times all the small boys of the neighborhood, the gander, seeking more excitement, attacked a cow.

The milkwoman had given the cow a basket of "scraps" which looked good to the gander, and as soon as Bossy had begun to regale herself, the bird flew at her, caught hold between the animal's horns, and began a vigorous flapping. The more vigorously the cow struggled to shake the gander off, the greater became the commotion, until finally, with a great toss of her head, she disengaged her tormentor and, wheeling, started away. Quick as thought the gander seized the retreating animal by the tail and hung on until she had run from the farmyard. Then the bird strutted back to the "scraps," amid a noise from the flock that sounded much like cheering.

Footprint in Face of Rock.

A footprint of a moccasin track has been found in a large rock which has a flat surface extending just above the ground near Bolecamp, Va. The imprint was made by the left foot and has the appearance of having been made when the rock was in a soft state rather than having been carved in it.

Guinea Chicks in Missouri.

A new breed of fowls, the like of which has never been seen before, are attracting the attention of the people of Smithville, Mo. The fowls are the property of Doctor J. R. Shikles, and have been named by him, Guineachicks, because they are the result of a cross between a big Rhode Island Red Rooster and a common Blue Guinea hen.

Doctor Shikles has a number of the fowls. They are now four months old, and weigh ten pounds each. Their bodies are shaped like those of chickens, and the feathers are white, with red dots nearly the size of a dime. About

the head and feet they resemble their guinea mother; also, they make a noise like guineas.

Their power of flight is great, and they will fight fiercely for themselves and the old mother hen. It is the opinion of those who have seen them, that the birds will be larger than turkeys when they have matured.

Steals Seven Bases in Game.

Tommy Jenkins, a nineteen-year-old Jacksonville, Fla., ball player, stole seven bases in a recent game. He is shortstop for the Perry, Fla., team.

Schoolboy Players Now Stars.

Five years ago "Charlie" Mullen, of the New York Yankees, and "Charlie" Schmutz, a big pitcher now with the Brooklyn Dodgers, were schoolboy stars on the same team in Seattle, Wash. Mullen, the Yankee first baseman, is a regular big leaguer. Schmutz recently signed a three years' contract with the Dodgers.

The Seattle High School team, on which Mullen and Schmutz first attracted attention, won the championship of the Northwest so impressively that a tour of the country was arranged. In the course of the trip Charlie Comiskey, owner of the Chicago White Sox, saw the schoolboys in action, and arranged for Mullen's services when the youngster completed his school term. Mullen went on a Southern trip with the White Sox, and was sent to Lincoln, Neb., when that team was in need of a first baseman. Mullen showed himself to be a smart ball player, and was intrusted with the management of the Western League team, a class A organization, and he had the team in the first division when the Yankees obtained him for a try-out.

Schmutz has one of the most peculiar deliveries ever seen in the big show. He heaves much like a shot-putter. Amos Rusie saw the young pitcher in Vancouver, of the Northwestern League, last season, and Brooklyn scouts were put on the trail of Schmutz through Rusie's observations.

Bayonet Notched Like Saw.

The *Matin*, a Paris newspaper, published a photograph of a saber bayonet found near the Maux battlefield, belonging to the Forty-seventh Prussian Infantry, one edge of which was notched like a saw. The *Matin* said that many similar saber bayonets have been found. The saw-like indentations, said the newspaper, were evidently made by a machine.

Alone Makes Double Plays.

Tris Speaker, of the Boston American League team, is the only outfielder in the big show who has this year executed a double play without assistance from any one. Not once, but twice, has Boston's high-salaried star turned this trick.

The first time Speaker made an unassisted double play was April 21st, in the game with the Athletics. August 8th, in a contest with the Tigers, Tris repeated his earlier performance.

Better Than Horse Traders.

Owner Charles Comiskey, of the Chicago White Sox, is spending money freely again this year to get the pick of the minor leaguers for his team. Happy Felch, of Milwaukee, is the highest-priced player secured this year, having cost the Chicago club $12,000.

Comiskey has the reputation of paying out more money for new players than most club owners of the big leagues. He has had his "bumps," too.

"These minor-league club owners are entirely too smart for me," he groaned recently. "A fellow has to keep his eyes open all the time. One of them came to me to sell a player. He showed the figures, and sang the praises of that fellow until I thought the club wasn't quite good enough for him. Finally I told him to bring the player and let me see him. He brought him.

"The fellow looked all right, and he didn't say much. He just sat around and kept his hat on. I wondered at it at the time, as all of us had our hats off, but thought maybe he didn't know any better. I bought him. The first day he practiced his hat blew off and I understood.

"That head came straight up to a point, and the owner had tipped the player to keep his hat on so I couldn't see the slant of his head until I bought him. They have horse traders beaten a block."

France Orders 10,000 Burros.

Mexican officials at Juarez, Mexico, have received orders from Mexico City to round up 10,000 burros for shipment to France. The order is in fulfillment of a contract. The donkeys will be gathered in the mountains of northern Mexico.

Stick Heads in Mail Sacks.

T. L. Anderson and J. L. Vaughan, both colored men, are relating the thrilling time they had at the hands of train robbers. They only saw one of the robbers, but are glad they didn't see any more. Anderson and Vaughan are mail clerks on Kansas City Southern train No. 3. They had to thrust their heads into mail pouches and keep them there at the command of a robber who boarded the train at a switch two miles north of Shreveport, La., and escaped with the registered mail. They do not know where the bandits left the car, because they did not dare remove the sacks until the train stopped at the railroad shop, a mile north of the switch where the robber boarded the train.

Novel Use for Ice Blocks.

In lowering a large steel storage tank to its foundation in a deep pit, Honolulu engineers built up a temporary resting place of blocks of ice, and then, after the structure had been properly centered, melted the ice uniformly with live steam. The great reservoir is twenty-four feet in diameter, twenty-five feet high, weighs fourteen tons, and has a capacity of 80,000 gallons.

Raccoon Hunter Falls After Battle in Tree.

The raccoon season is on, and Horace Robinson, of Smithville, Md., is the hero, or, rather, the victim, of the first adventure in this vicinity.

Robinson, a young farmer, followed five raccoons to a big oak tree, which the animals climbed. Thinking he could capture one of them alive, Robinson also climbed the tree, but when he reached the raccoons, they surrounded him and, though he kept his arms going like piston rods, one of the animals every now and then would inflict an ugly gash with its claws in some part of his

body. Robinson kept up the fight until, completely exhausted, he fell to the ground. Three of his ribs were broken. He dragged himself to the county road, where his cries were heard by his father, W. H. Robinson, who helped get him home.

He Was Such a Nice Nephew.

Neighbors of Henry Lefkowitz, who resides on the Kinsman Road, Cleveland, Ohio, observed a young man, armed with a suit case, knocking at the door of the Lefkowitz home. The neighbors told the young man the family was away.

"I'm Mr. Lefkowitz's nephew," said the stranger, removing his hat and bowing low. "They expected me on a train, and have probably gone to meet me. I'd like to get in. Has any one a key to fit the door?"

An obliging neighbor unlocked the door for the young man. When the Lefkowitz family returned, they found the house had been ransacked. Jewelry valued at $75 had vanished. So had the "nephew."

A Plucky Nine-year-old Boy.

Julius Allenord, a nine-year-old Midland County boy, is in a hospital at Saginaw, Mich., with a shattered arm and part of a charge from a shotgun in his chest.

The boy was at home with a brother when a loaded shotgun that hung on the wall was knocked loose and fell. When the weapon struck the floor it exploded, the charge striking Julius.

The boy's brother was unable to care for the injured lad, except to bind the arm to stop the flow of blood, while both walked four miles into Midland, where Julius' wounds were dressed by a physician, who despaired of saving the boy's arm, but declared he will live.

Aged "Con" Man Back in Jail.

A feeble, wizen-faced old man, with long white hair, tottered before the bench in the North Side court, at Kansas City, Mo. He was Charles Harris, dean of the "con" men. It was the same old charge. Harris had been arrested at the Union Depot while in the act of fleecing a country boy out of $19. He did not deny the charge.

"What is an old man going to do, judge?" he quavered. "It's the only way I know to make a living. Of course, it's a losing game, or I wouldn't be here now without money, without friends, and without a home. But it's all I know how to do."

Judge Kennedy fined him $50 and sent him to the municipal farm. Eighteen of Harris' seventy-six years have been spent in penitentiaries, besides those spent during innumerable jail sentences.

Sneeze Dislocates Arm.

While helping unload bundles of wheat from a wagon, the dust from the straw caused Charles Gough, a farmer residing fifteen miles southeast of Rich Hill, Mo., to sneeze so violently that his right arm was dislocated at the shoulder.

Says Tire Won't Blow Out.

L. A. Subert, a Cleveland, Ohio, inventor, has a new fabric to be used in making automobile tires, which he declares will not blow out. The product is a tape made up of interwoven yarns, enmeshed in rubber, and the inventor claims it will stand almost unlimited pressure. It is also to be used in the making of airbrake and fire hose.

Subert went to Cleveland from New York twenty years ago, after having lost a fortune in the panic of 1893. He has worked on different inventions, finally settling on the present one, which he believes will make him a millionaire.

Show Baby Dress Eighty Years Old.

At a family reunion at the home of Doctor and Mrs. B. L. Bates, at Elsie, Mich., their daughter, Barbary Louise, five weeks old, was the precious little magnet around which the relatives clustered. The baby was attired in a dress which has been in the family for nearly eighty years.

The little white dress was made by hand in pioneer days by the mother of L. G. Bates, who is grandfather of Doctor Bates' daughter. It was the first dress worn by L. G. Bates and was worn successively by his four brothers, his sister, his five children, and, in turn, by each of his numerous grandchildren. It is a beautiful specimen of hand embroidery and is still whole.

Collects Tiny Arrow Heads.

J. W. Robinette, of Blackwater, Va., sends a specimen of tiny arrowheads, which some think were made by a race of prehistoric Indians or people.

"The little arrowheads would suggest a race of people about the size of Dean Swift's miniature folks, as described in his stories," he says. "I have a good many of these little points found in a cave here, where all sorts of stone and flint implements have been unearthed and which may have been the burial place of some preadamite tribe thousands of years ago. I have nothing to sell, but might exchange with some of your readers who are interested in curios.

The Terrors of War.

A vivid view of the terrors of war is given by the story of a seventeen-year-old American girl, Miss Florence Marx, of 4346 Langley Avenue, Chicago. She and her aunt, who corroborates all her statements, were unwilling witnesses of the bloody fighting at Charleroi, Belgium. The two are still shaken by the experiences at Charleroi and in fleeing to the home of Florence's uncle, a German citizen living at Brussels, where they found safety.

"I was staying with my aunt," said the girl. "Her house was on one of the principal boulevards of Charleroi. My uncle, who also has a house in Brussels, thought Charleroi would be safer for us. It turned out the other way. Shortly after our arrival we were told to stay indoors, as there might be fighting near by.

"We saw some French soldiers march past and heard shooting, but we were not afraid because we were sure the French would keep the Germans away. Early the next morning we heard more shooting not far off. Soon about one hundred soldiers with lances came riding down the boulevard. People looked out of the windows and shouted 'Long live the English!' but my aunt knew they were Germans. They had just passed our house when there was more shouting from the bridge at the end of the

boulevard. Some of the men fell off their horses and the rest ran away.

"We closed the shutters and all of us went to the back part of the house. I waited a while, and then went upstairs and peeped out of a third-story window. I saw a big crowd of women, children, and old men running in the middle of the street.

"Just behind them were some soldiers with revolvers driving them along and cursing. It was an awful sight, and I nearly fainted. Suddenly I heard a lot more shooting, and an awful loud cannon. Many men came rolling down the hill, hit the curb opposite our house, and stopped. Then there was more shooting, and I saw more Germans coming.

"I managed to close the shutter and get downstairs to tell my aunt what I had seen. Then soldiers began yelling worse than Indians and setting fire to the houses. They broke the front windows of our house and threw fire on the parlor floor. We could not put it out, and so we ran to the kitchen. There we found the hired girl from the house next door, and she was all bloody. She had crawled across a window ledge on the court and into our window. She said their house was burning. She looked from the basement window when a soldier jabbed his bayonet through the glass and struck her arm.

"The fire in our parlor did not catch, after all, but our house took fire from the house next door, and so my aunt said we must try to run somewhere else. We ran across the street, in the midst of all that shooting. Some soldiers had a machine gun pointed right at us, but when they saw we were only women, they did not fire. A woman across the street let us go in her house, but pretty soon everything was burning, so we all had to go to the hospital for shelter. There were some wounded Germans there and lots of citizens. The shooting continued all night, and we could not sleep any. The next day so many wounded were brought in that they made us get out, and we went to a hotel. The shooting stopped after that, but people kept coming and telling awful stories. Fifteen naked men and women were thrown down a well. Some others tried to pull the bodies out, but all were dead.

"When we were sitting in the hotel dining room two soldiers came and asked us to have some beer. They were drunk and we were frightened, but just then they saw an officer sitting in a corner, looking at them, and so they left. We did not think it safe to stay where there were so many soldiers. So we passed that night in a strange warehouse, and the next day we got a van and started for Brussels.

"It took us thirty-six hours to get there. Most of the houses along the way were burned. Those that were not burned had written on the door, in German: 'Good people here.' Now, I do not call that war. I call it—well, I don't know what."

Seventy-two Perish When Steamer Sinks.

Later reports of the sinking of the steamship *Francis H. Leggett,* off the Oregon coast recently, show that seventy-two passengers and members of the crew were lost, and that the disaster is one of the worst that has happened in this vicinity in years.

The vessel shifted cargo during a gale and sunk off the Oregon coast, sixty miles south of the Columbia River. Details of the catastrophe reached Astoria, Ore., by wireless from the steamship *Beaver,* of the San Francisco & Portland Company, which is standing by at the scene of the wreck.

There were only three survivors. Alexander Farrell, a passenger, was found by the *Beaver* after floating ten hours in the heavy seas. Farrell says he saw five women and children sink near him. He says the *Leggett* turned completely over and disappeared in a twinkling.

The *Beaver* was not in contact with the lost ship, but ran into her wreckage about midnight, after which time she found the associated oil steamship *Frank H. Buck,* with boats out, searching for survivors.

Farrell was the only man picked up by the *Beaver.* Two other survivors are said to be on board the *Buck,* which is still at the scene of the wreck.

The *Leggett* carried fifty passengers and a crew of twenty-five. She sailed from Portland September 12th, for Hoquiam, Wash., to load lumber for California. She left Hoquiam Thursday morning last week.

Fined for Tipping Waiter.

D. G. Bailey, representative of the Carter White Lead Company, Chicago, forfeited $50 as a fine for tipping a porter twenty-five cents in the Edwards House, at Jackson, Miss. Bailey says he is glad he didn't tip the porter a dollar or a dollar and a half.

River Boats Collide; Fourteen Drown.

The collier *Lingan* rammed and sank the government steamer *Montmagny* in a fog in St. Lawrence River, twenty-six miles from Quebec. Fourteen persons, members of the *Montmagny's* crew and of families of two lighthouse keepers aboard the *Montmagny,* lost their lives.

Second Officer La Chance, of the *Montmagny,* died with two children in his arms in an attempt to rescue them.

Mrs. Lavelle, wife of the lighthouse keeper at Flower Island, and her four children were lost. Mrs. Richards, wife of a lighthouse keeper at Belle Isle, and her seven children were aboard the *Montmagny.* How many of them were saved is not known.

Blast Kills Two Girls.

Two girls were killed at Queenston, Ont., when a huge stone, thrown from a blast, crashed through the roof of a shed in which they had taken shelter. They were Jozefina Negerak, eighteen, and Anna Dzierzawska, nineteen, both of Buffalo.

Bandits Get $8,450 from Kansas Bank.

Border days had an echo in the robbery of the First National Bank of Baxter Springs, Kan., sixteen miles west of Joplin, Mo.

Three bandits rode into the town on horses, dismounted calmly at the bank, entered, covered the cashier and two depositors with revolvers, took $8,450, locked the three in a vault, and then rode away into the hills south of the city.

None of the robbers was masked and not a shot was fired.

The robbers found Frank L. Brewster, the cashier,

preparing to close the bank for the day, the two depositors having just entered.

"Look at me," demanded the spokesman of the bandit trio. They did, each peering into the barrel of a revolver. "Put your money in this sack," he told the cashier. Brewster attempted to cover several stacks of twenty-dollar gold pieces with a money tray.

"None of that goes," said the robber. "Don't try to hide anything."

Brewster then turned over all.

Eleven Die in Train Crash.

The death list in the wreck of Alabama Great Southern passenger train No. 2 reached eleven when M. J. McDonough, assistant general freight agent of the road, and John S. Preston, of Abilene, Texas, died of their injuries at Livingston, Ala.

Bloodhounds are being used to trail the men who are believed by officials to have tampered with the switch and derailed the train, causing it to collide with a freight. Twenty persons were injured.

Oldfield Has Nerve, but There's a Limit.

"I've always thought I had a lot of nerve," said Barney Oldfield, the veteran automobile racer, in Chicago the other day. "My friends have told me so, and the newspapers have written about Oldfield's nerve. But I certainly was forced to take a back seat one day.

"It happened on a Southern track, where I was carded as one of the feature drivers. The promoter, a big fellow with leather lungs, also acted as announcer during the race.

"He would yell out, through a megaphone: 'Barney Oldfield is now cranking his car,' 'Barney Oldfield is now changing a tire,' and so on.

"After the race I rode back to the city on a crowded car, and everybody was talking about the event. A couple of young fellows sat next to me, and one exclaimed:

"'Gee, Oldfield has a lot of nerve, hasn't he?'

"'Perhaps he has,' said the other. 'But he hasn't half the nerve the promoter has in staging that kind of a race.'

"Needless to say I didn't divulge my identity."

Train Bandits Rob Only Men.

Two masked men who robbed the Southern Pacific fast passenger train No. 75 near Burbank, eleven miles north of Los Angeles, Cal., got $550, with much jewelry. The fact that it was the second train robbery at the same place within two months made the authorities especially anxious to capture the bandits. The previous robbery netted about $3,200.

The last affair was confined to the observation car. The women in the car were told to keep their money and jewelry. Twenty-five men were robbed in a few minutes. Then the bandits pulled the bell cord and dropped off at a station four miles farther up the line.

More Foul Play in Mine of Mystery.

The "Mine of Mystery," at Joplin, Mo., has claimed another life. James Kellis Ervin, twenty-five years old, is the latest person to meet a strange death in what is known as the Shamrock Mine on the old John O'Keefe lease. Ervin's body was found in the tub which was hoisted from the mine at three o'clock in the morning. His right leg was broken, a gash cut in his chin, and body badly bruised. The shaft is about eighty feet deep.

Twenty years ago "Buffalo Bill" Jones, a noted character about the mining district, was found dead at the bottom of this shaft. Since that time three others have lost their lives in the Mine of Mystery.

"Mystery Shaft's" victims to date are: 1894, Buffalo Bill Jones; 1895, John Stermer; 1903, Tom Potter; 1914, James Kellis Ervin.

The authorities are convinced of foul play in the case of the last victim, James Ervin, as bloodstains were found around the top of the shaft, and a small bowlder covered with blood was found in the bottom of the shaft. There was no post-mortem examination held, and the coroner's jury adjourned after hearing the evidence, without ascertaining the cause.

German Policy of Silence.

"When I was a boy," said an elderly German newspaper man in Chicago recently, "I lived near Carlsruhe, in Germany. I well remember," he continued, "the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. I remember my father and mother reading the newspapers to find out what had happened. The papers never told much about it, just a few lines, and maybe it said: 'Another battle has been fought, and the French badly beaten.' Then the German paper said: 'On our side thirteen killed, twenty-five or thirty wounded, and a few missing.' Just that and no more.

"But in a day or two along came four or five cars on the railroad and all piled full of men with legs shot off, arms off, heads tied up, and pretty quick back of our house, in the big field, we see long rows of tents full of these wounded German fellers. So, just like it is now, the German government allowed nothing told then. Always the same when Germany has a war; they tell nothing."

Bryan Chopping Wood to Cut His Weight.

For the last twenty years Secretary of State Bryan has weighed exactly 220 pounds, never varying. About six weeks ago he decided he was too heavy, and looked up the recipe of Ex-president Taft for reducing weight. Then Mr. Bryan started to eat only one hearty meal a day and to take violent exercise at least once a week.

Now the secretary weighs 203 pounds. He will continue his weight-reducing efforts until he is about 195, which, the insurance doctors say, is right for a man of his age and height.

The violent exercise Mr. Bryan takes is wood-cutting. He goes to the farm of Senator Blair Lee, in Maryland, cuts down a tree, and then cuts it into lengths suitable for short fireplaces, and they do say he can make the chips fly.

Aged Lovers Wed After Forty Years.

Cupid and the war have conspired to launch a matrimonial venture under most unusual circumstances. The Reverend G. F. Assiter, of the Christian Church, has just united in marriage Thomas Edwards, of Salem, Ore., to Mrs. Emily Rodenhurst, of London, Ont. Thomas is eighty-four years old and Emily is seventy years old, but they are as happy as bride and bridegroom of twenty. The two are old sweethearts.

When Mrs. Rodenhurst was Miss Weston, Edwards used to come to London to see her family, and finally fell in love with Emily. Forty years ago he went west to make his fortune, and in the years which passed gradually lost track of the "folks at home."

At last, however, he made his "pile," and a few months ago made up his mind to return to London to look up the people he had known so well. He found Emily Weston Mrs. Rodenhurst, but still pretty much the same Emily, as far as spirits went. They decided to return to the West together, as Mrs. Rodenhurst was fearful of the suffering which might come to Canadians and all residents of the country through the war.

They will live in Salem. Mr. Edwards is a veteran of the Northwest rebellion himself, but believes the time is past when he could do any good at the business end of a rifle.

Nothing in a Name.

When the baseball fans watching a league game applaud a player who has just made a great catch and yell: "Good work, Jones," maybe they are talking to a man named Bascom. There are now thirty-two players in the major leagues known to be going under assumed names. How many others have phony monakers is hard to tell. Many of them are boys who started their careers under assumed names and kept them after becoming well known. The principal reason for the changes of name is family objections to baseball as a profession.

Nurse Slain as She Aids Soldier.

Mme. Adrienne Buhet, one of the brave Frenchwomen who went to the front to nurse the wounded, is dead, slain on a battlefield. The official report says she was struck by a bullet from a machine gun as she was raising the head of a stricken soldier.

Baby is Killed by Family Auto.

Elmer, the two-year-old son of George L. Holmes, a farmer, of Moorestown, N. J., was killed by an auto driven by his father, in which his two little sisters were riding. The boy was struck as Holmes backed the car out of the garage in the rear of his home. Margaret, seven years, and Helen, ten, had been seated in the car to be taken to school. As Holmes took his place at the wheel, Elmer toddled out of the house and sat on the lawn, directly in the path of the car. Holmes, not seeing him, started the vehicle.

Bold Boy Bandit in Tears.

Boys who think the bandit profession is filled with romance and adventure, with wads of money, and much fun, will do well to ponder the present condition of Henry J. Fernekes, Chicago's eighteen-year-old holdup artist.

Henry has done all the moving-picture bandits have done—and then some. He ran away from his father. He married a sixteen-year-old girl whom his father had forbidden him to marry. He quit his nine-dollar-a-week job; he robbed ticket agents on the elevated road; he robbed a woman in an office in a loop skyscraper in broad daylight; he hid in another office while the police looked everywhere else for him.

Some of his exploits are nearly unbelievable—so much as to make his father marvel and say: 'I don't understand his nerve. It is not in our blood. I don't want to see him, and will have nothing to do with him."

All the bravado and the gayety went out of young Fernekes' face when he heard his father's dictum. He cried, forgetting that he was a bold, bad highwayman, a knight who plundered for his love. He was just a boy.

War in the Maine Woods.

The European war has spread to the Maine woods. More than sixty lumbermen, mostly Poles and French Canadians, fought a pitched battle at Grand Brook, fourteen miles from Millinocket, Me., after an argument over the great European struggle. One man was killed and three were wounded. Guns were used during the fight. Fifty-three men were arrested and brought to Millinocket, chained together.

The lumbermen formed a crew of the Great Northern Paper Company, which was just entering the woods to begin work.

His Horseshoe Double-faced.

A "good-luck" horseshoe that A. L. Brecht, of Los Angeles, Cal., carried with him on a rabbit hunt sent him to the hospital.

As Brecht was leaning on his hammerless shotgun, the muzzle under his left armpit, holding his horseshoe and looking at his big pile of rabbits, the horseshoe slipped from his fingers, one end catching inside the trigger guard and releasing one of the triggers.

The charge of shot tore a hole through the muscles under his left shoulder.

Youthful Aviator Takes People Up.

Herbert Hunter, a youthful aviator, of Seattle, Wash., is performing wonders with a biplane which was built in Seattle. He has made many successful trips over the city and Elliott Bay, and in addition to carrying passengers daily, has contracted for several exhibitions throughout the Northwest.

Calls Himself Burden.

A spectacle unique in the history of New York was seen in the supreme court in Brooklyn when Doctor Joseph Hand, a helpless paralytic, pleaded from the witness stand for a divorce for his wife.

With his wife hiding her face in her hands and sobbing, Doctor Hand told the court she should have her freedom.

"I should never have married her," he said, "for I knew I would become a paralytic. But I loved her so much I foolishly hoped I might be saved. Now I know I did wrong, and she should not be burdened by me."

Decision in the case was withheld.

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